HAMLET

Act 1

Scene 1

(the castle grounds, at night)

Enter Barnardo and Francisco, two sentinels

Barnardo Who’s there?

Francisco No, answer me! Stay where you are and identify yourself!

Barnardo Long live the King!

Francisco Barnardo?

Barnardo It is he.

Francisco You come most promptly.

Barnardo It’s past twelve. You can retire to bed, Francisco.

Francisco I’m glad to be relieved; it’s bitterly cold and I am sick at heart.

Barnardo Have you had a quiet guard?

Francisco There hasn’t been so much as a mouse stirring.

Barnardo Well, good night. If you meet Horatio and Marcellus, who are with me on this watch, bid them make haste.

Francisco I think I hear them.

Enter Horatio and Marcellus

Francisco Halt! Who’s there?

Horatio Friends to this country.

Marcellus And liegemen to the King.

Francisco I bid you good night.

Marcellus Farewell, honest soldier. By whom have you been relieved?

Francisco Barnardo has taken my place. Good night.
Exit Francisco

Marcellus  Hello, Barnardo!

Barnardo  Is Horatio there?

Horatio  He is.

Barnardo  Welcome, Horatio. Welcome, Marcellus.

Horatio  Well has this thing appeared again tonight?

Barnardo  I’ve seen nothing.

Marcellus  Horatio refuses to believe this dreadful vision that twice we’ve seen is anything but our imagination. Therefore, I have persuaded him to accompany us on our watch this night, and should this apparition appear he’ll be left in no doubt as to the truth of what we’ve reported and he may himself speak to it.

Horatio  I’m afraid I’m far from convinced that anything will appear. It seems to me that accumulated tedium and fatigue resulting from long and uneventful nights having taken their toll offers the most plausible explanation.

Barnardo  Sit down awhile and listen to us again. Your mind is fortified against believing our story, against accepting what we’ve seen out here on two nights.

Horatio  We’ll sit down then. And let us hear Barnardo speak of this.

Barnardo  Last night, as the bell struck ‘one’,

Enter Ghost

Marcellus  Over there! Look where it comes again.

Barnardo  Its appearance like that of the dead King.

Marcellus  I believe Latin is the appropriate language in which to address such a being. Horatio, you’re a scholar, speak to it.

Barnardo  Do you not agree it looks like the King?

Horatio  Very much. It fills me with fear and wonder.

Barnardo  It wants to be spoken to.

Marcellus  Question it, Horatio.
Horatio  What right have you to come before us at this time and to appear as the former King of Denmark, in the armour he wore in battle? By Heaven, I command you to speak.

Marcellus  It seems you are not the person it wishes to address.

Barnardo  See, it stalks away.

Horatio  Stay, speak, speak, I command you to speak!

Exit Ghost

Marcellus  It is gone and will not answer.

Barnardo  Well, Horatio, do you still think it’s our imagination? You’re trembling and look pale. You must now be convinced that this is something more than just fantasy? What do you make of it?

Horatio  Before my God, I would never have believed this without having witnessed it for myself.

Marcellus  Is it not like the King?

Horatio  Most certainly. Such was the armour he had on when he battled the King of Norway. It is strange.

Marcellus  As I said, on two previous nights and exactly at this hour it has appeared in that very form and stalked by us.

Horatio  I do not know what to think of this, but I’m inclined to believe this bodes a very troubled state of affairs for our country.

Marcellus  Even while we’re out here the King’s subjects are at work, toiling constantly throughout the day and night, forging armaments. We’re importing more weapons, commissioning ships, working seven days a week. What is it that demands all of this? Who can tell me?

Horatio  I believe I can provide an answer. At least according to rumour: our last King, whose form appeared to us just now, was, as you know, challenged by Fortinbras of Norway, and in the subsequent confrontation our valiant King Hamlet, an esteemed figure in the western world, killed this Fortinbras who then, by official agreement, forfeited the lands he possessed, along with his life, to the victor. Of course, a sufficient portion of our lands was wagered by our King, which would have been claimed under the terms of the agreement by Fortinbras had he defeated Hamlet. Now, in response, the King’s son, a young and rather undisciplined Prince Fortinbras, went out and gathered together a group of very determined outlaws from around the remote parts of Norway, people of this nature being quite necessary to what he is plotting. The state believes it is his intention to forcibly retake those aforementioned lands, which his father had lost; lands for which we have the legal right of ownership. I’m assuming that this is the primary motive for our country’s preparations for war;
that this is the reason why we’re out here on watch duty, the reason for all of the furious activity and turmoil in the land.

**Barnardo** It would seem appropriate then that this ominous figure, this apparition, has appeared before us in the form of our dead King, who is the cause of these wars.

**Horatio** The ghost itself may be of little importance. If we look back in history at the wealthy and flourishing state of Rome around the time Julius Caesar, the most powerful of all the Caesars, was murdered, there were many unfavourable omens. The graves stood empty and dead bodies lay shrouded in the Roman streets. There were comets and astrological signs. There was an eclipse of the moon. There have been similar portents in our country, and they have always foreshadowed some impending crisis, serving to forewarn the people.

*Enter Ghost*

Behold! Look where it comes again. I’ll cross its path though I may endanger myself.

**Ghost spreads its arms**

Stay! If you are capable of communicating then speak to me. If there is something you wish done, some task or duty you require of us, speak to me. If you’re privy to our country’s fate which, foreknowing, we may avoid, I beg of you to tell me. Or if you’re here to haunt the site of some buried treasure you acquired during your life, as it is said that spirits often return to do, then speak of it, stay and speak.

*The cock crows*

Stop it, Marcellus.

**Marcellus** Shall I strike it with my partisan?

**Horatio** Yes if it will not stay.

**Barnardo** It’s here.

**Horatio** It’s here.

*Exit Ghost*

**Marcellus** It’s gone. We have offended it by acting in such a manner, offering it the show of violence; for as a ghost it would, of course, be invulnerable.

**Barnardo** It was about to speak when the cock crew.

**Horatio** And then it began a hasty exit, the sound of the cock crowing heralding the coming of daybreak. Roaming the Earth, it had strayed beyond the confines of its own world and this would have acted as a warning to the spirit to quickly return.
Marcellus  It faded as the cock crew. Some say that in preparation for the coming Christmas season, the cock sings all night long and no spirit dares to wander beyond its normal confines; no planets exert any harmful effects; no witch has power to cast evil spells. So holy is this time.

Horatio  Having seen it I do believe, though I am not without some degree of scepticism. But it’s morning now (observing the pink, orangey sky of daybreak, the light of which falls upon and exposes the dew-covered grass of the hilltops to the east). Our watch is over. I believe we should impart what we have seen here tonight to Prince Hamlet. I’m confident this spirit, which refuses to address us, will speak to him. Does each of you consent that we will acquaint him with this news? It is our duty as his close friends.

Marcellus  I agree, we should tell him. I know where we can find him this morning.

Scene 2

(the King’s court)

*Flourish of trumpets. Enter Claudio, Gertrude, Hamlet, Voltemand, Cornelius, Polonius, Laertes and Courtiers*

King  Though the memory of our dear brother’s death is still fresh, and it would be proper for us to bear our hearts in grief, for our whole kingdom to join together in mourning, we should not allow ourselves to be overcome by sorrow. We have to be sensible and reasonable in our grieving for him, not forgetting that we must continue with our own lives. And so to my former sister-in-law, now our queen, who shares with me the lands of this country. It was with a subdued sense of joy, a mixture of gladness and sorrow, that we married. The funeral was not without a certain sense of merriment, our marriage not without a sense of grief, an occasion of both delight and sadness in equal measure. We have endeavoured to act in accordance with your wisdom and advice. You supported and willingly permitted this marriage. I’d like to express my gratitude to you all. The next piece of news I have for you is that young Prince Fortinbras of Norway, someone who holds us in low regard, believes our country to be in a state of turmoil and disarray following our dear brother’s death. He believes us to be vulnerable as a result and that this has afforded him an advantage. Under such false impressions, he has made numerous demands that we surrender those lands which were lost by his father and subsequently claimed, quite legally, by our most valiant brother. Which brings us to the reason we are gathered here at this time. We have much important business to attend to. The situation in Norway is somewhat similar to our own. King Fortinbras was succeeded by his brother and not by his son, a somewhat irresponsible youth who appears to have very grand designs and aspirations for himself. We have here a writ to the King of Norway. The King is weak and bedridden, scarcely aware of his nephew’s activities. This writ demands that the King put a stop to the actions of his nephew. I’m sure he’ll view it most favourably, particularly since the finances and the people enlisted to comprise the military forces supporting his nephew’s purposes, are all his. They’re his subjects, and they’re acting without any official consent, even without his knowledge. I’m therefore dispatching you Cornelius, and you Voltemand, to convey this message to the King of
Norway. You have the power to negotiate on our behalf so far as these detailed articles permit. Farewell. You demonstrate your allegiance to your country by the speed and efficiency with which you conduct this mission.

**Cornelius** In this, as in all things, we will do our duty to the utmost of our abilities.

**King** We do not doubt it. Farewell.

*Exit Voltemand and Cornelius*

And now, Laertes, what’s the news with you? You spoke of some request. You must tell me what it is Laertes, what it is that you want, which I will not give without your asking for it. As my trusted councillor, your father is an integral and most important figure within the governing body of Denmark. What would you ask of me, Laertes?

**Laertes** My liege, I seek your leave to return to France, from where, though willingly I came to Denmark as a matter of duty, to attend your coronation, I must confess, now that I have fulfilled that obligation I’m concerned with returning to pursue my interests in France. I surrender my wishes to your gracious leave.

**King** Have you your father’s permission? Polonius?

**Polonius** He has, my lord, after much petition, finally received my permission. Though it was not without some reluctance that I granted my consent. I do beseech that you give him leave to go.

**King** Make the most of your youth, Laertes. Your time is yours to do with as you please. You may turn your abilities to whatever purposes you desire. And now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son.

**Hamlet** Though closely related, we aren’t really on the best of terms.

**King** Why do you remain so despondent?

**Hamlet** Not so, my lord, I *am*, after all, still the King’s son.

**Queen** Hamlet, you should relinquish this dark and sombre mood. Consider the King as your friend. There is no need for you to remain in this downcast state, preoccupied with your father. You know it to be the inevitable fate that awaits us all. Everything that lives must die, passing through nature into eternity.

**Hamlet** Yes, madam, it is common.

**Queen** Why must this matter feel so much more consuming with you?

**Hamlet** Feel, madam? You understatement the matter. For me, mourning my father’s death is not simply about the wearing of customary black attire, or presenting a gloomy expression, or indeed any of the overt displays of sorrow that might be exhibited. These are merely actions that an actor might perform. What is within me
cannot be outwardly expressed in such a manner; these constitute only the trappings of sadness and grief.

**King** It is commendable, Hamlet, that you are showing this much respect towards your father, but you must know your father lost a father, that father lost, lost his; in each case the surviving son bound, for some term, to show obsequious sorrow. But to continue this obstinate grieving serves only to demonstrate an impious stubbornness. It is unmanly and inappropriate. I would say even irreligious. It’s as though you’re ignoring the reverence and discipline that religion teaches us. Our demise is inescapable, death one of the commonest things we know. So why display such a perverse and intransigent engrossment in mourning? Though it is something by which we are distressed, we should not allow it to become an obsession, to become something by which we are dominated. It is a sin against God and against the dead, an offence to the natural order of things, to exhibit this absurd and protracted behaviour over the death of your father. We pray that you overcome this state of sadness, this depression, and consider the rest of us instead. Let the world take note that you are the most immediate to the throne of Denmark. With the noble love a father shows his son, I will always impart to you my generosity. Regarding your intention to return to university in Wittenberg, this is something we really would prefer that you did not do. We beseech that you to remain here with us. You are our main courtier and our son.

**Queen** I do not want to have to worry about you, Hamlet. I pray that you stay with us. Go not to Wittenberg.

**Hamlet** I shall, to the best of my ability, obey your wishes.

**King** A loving and dutiful reply. Remain with us in Denmark. Madam, come. Hamlet’s agreement gives me much pleasure. In thanksgiving, we will rejoice. The cannon shall be fired; while we are enjoying ourselves its noise will resound in the heavens. Come, we shall leave.

*Exit all but Hamlet*

**Hamlet** O that the flesh is weak and prone to immorality and sin. If only this could be changed, if we could all become honourable and virtuous, altruistic, benevolent. If only suicide was not forbidden by religious law. O God! God! How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable everything about this world seems to be. It is a world possessed entirely by a sinister corruption underlying the façade of decent civilisation, the product of the unprincipled, unscrupulous proclivities and self-interest of people. That it should come to this! My father dead not two months and so excellent a king, a god by comparison to a beast, so loving to my mother that he would not even permit the winds to blow too harshly upon her face. It was as if her appetite for him grew the more they were together. And yet within a month - let me not think about this - after having barely worn the shoes in which she followed my poor father’s coffin - why, even an animal, incapable of logical and rational thought, would have mourned longer - she married my father’s brother. But he is nothing like my father. There is nothing in common between those two. Within a month of the pretence which was her grief, the tears of her disingenuous mourning, her insincerity betrayed by her conduct, she married; deliberately entering into this incestuous relationship, seizing the opportunity to do so almost without hesitation. No good can come of this. It causes me yet more
grief that I must hold my tongue, for I can hardly confront anyone over my feelings on this matter.

Enter Horatio, Marcellus and Barnardo

Horatio Hail to your lordship.

Hamlet I am glad to see you well, Horatio.

Horatio And I you, my lord, ever you poor servant.

Hamlet My good friend, you need not address me in that manner. We are equals. Marcellus (acknowledging Marcellus).

Marcellus My good lord.

Hamlet Greetings to you, sir (to Barnardo). What are you doing here, away from Wittenberg (to Horatio)?

Horatio A truant disposition, my good lord.

Hamlet I would not hear your enemy say that of you. Nor shall you say such unfavourable things about yourself. I know you are no truant. But what is your affair in Elsinore? You’ll be taught to drink well before you leave us (sly allusion to the King’s excessive drinking habits).

Horatio My lord, I came to see your father’s funeral.

Hamlet Please do not insult my intelligence, fellow student. I think it was to see my mother’s wedding.

Horatio Indeed, my lord, it followed surprisingly soon.

Hamlet Thrift, thrift, Horatio. The meats roasted for the funeral were served cold at the wedding. I’d rather meet my worst enemy in Heaven than to have seen that day, Horatio. My father, I believe I see my father.

Horatio Where, my lord?

Hamlet In my mind’s eye, Horatio.

Horatio He was a noble and respected king.

Hamlet He was the ideal of manhood, admirable in every way. I shall not encounter a person of his like again.

Horatio My lord, I think I saw him last night?

Hamlet Saw? Who?
Horatio  My lord, the King your father.

Hamlet  My father?
Horatio  Temper your surprise for a moment, that you may listen more attentively as I tell you of this marvel that both these gentlemen and I have witnessed.

Hamlet  For the love of God, let me hear of it!

Horatio  On two consecutive nights, these gentlemen, Marcellus and Barnardo, while on their watch, out in the most desolate areas in the middle of the night, encountered it. A figure like your father, in armour, and exact in every detail from head to toe appeared before them and, in a solemn and stately manner, marched slowly by. Three times he walked past them, to their fear and astonishment, coming within a baton’s length, while they, overwhelmed by terror, stood in silence and did not speak to him. This they reported to me in total secrecy and in response I decided to accompany them on their next watch, during which, just as they had described and at the time they stated, every word of what they had told me proving true, the apparition appeared. I knew your father. It looked exactly as he did.

Hamlet  But where was this?

Horatio  My lord, upon the platform where we watch.

Hamlet  Did you not speak to it?

Horatio  My lord, I did, but it made no reply. Yet at one point it lifted up its head as though it were about to speak. But at that very moment the morning cock crew loud, and at the sound it shrunk away in haste and vanished from our sight.

Hamlet  ‘tis very strange.

Horatio  My honoured lord, I swear to you it is true. And we believed it our duty to let you know of it.

Hamlet  Indeed, sirs; but this troubles me. Are you on guard duty again tonight?

All  We are, my lord.

Hamlet  In his armour, you say?

All  In his armour, my lord.

Hamlet  From top to toe?

All  My lord, from head to foot.

Hamlet  Then you did not see his face?

Horatio  O yes, my lord, he wore his visor up.
Hamlet  How did he look, frowningly?
Horatio  A countenance more of sorrow than anger.
Hamlet  Pale, or red?
Horatio  Oh, very pale.
Hamlet  And he fixed his eyes upon you?
Horatio  Most constantly.
Hamlet  I wish I had been there.
Horatio  It would have astounded you.
Hamlet  I believe it would. Did it stay long?
Horatio  Counting with moderate haste, one may have reached a hundred.
Marcellus  No, longer.
Horatio  Not when I saw it.
Hamlet  His beard was grey, no?
Horatio  It was as I have seen it when he was alive, black with silver hairs.
Hamlet  I will watch tonight. Perhaps it will appear again.
Horatio  I warrant it will.

Hamlet  If it assumes the appearance of my noble father, I’ll speak to it though the mouth of Hell may open and deter me from this action, should it prove the case that I am in fact communicating with some evil spirit. I ask that you all, if you have until now kept from divulging your knowledge of this, maintain your silence. And whatever else shall occur tonight, we can try to understand the motives of this spirit but we must not reveal any of this. I will reward your friendship. So I’ll meet with you tonight upon the platform between eleven and twelve.

All  Our duty is to your honour.

Hamlet  Friendship is my duty to you. Farewell.

Exit Horatio, Barnardo and Marcellus

My father’s spirit, in arms! All is not well. I suspect some foul play, a possible explanation for a ghost’s appearance being that it wishes to bring to our attention an act of treachery or evil. However, I must remain patient until late tonight. Some crime, concealed from the knowledge of us earthly mortals, will be revealed.
Scene 3

(somewhere inside the castle)

Enter Laertes and Ophelia

Laertes My belongings are all ready for the journey. Farewell. And sister, when the winds are favourable and there is a ship bound for France, let me hear from you.

Ophelia Do you doubt that I would?

Laertes Regarding Hamlet; he is merely toying with your affections. For him, what there is between you is little more than a passing phase, a youthful dalliance. His feelings for you will not last; they are not genuine or wholehearted.

Ophelia Do you really believe this is true?

Laertes Do not seek to further this relationship; think of it no more. As time passes, the demands made of him will increase. He is not in a position, as ordinary people are, to decide his own future or to simply live as he pleases. He is a subject of his position as a Prince. There will be many affairs to which he will be forced to devote himself, matters of such importance that they will outweigh his love for you. In the future, the well-being of the entire country will be in his hands if he becomes king. Perhaps he does love you now; perhaps his intentions towards you will remain honourable for the time being; but in this high position he will have much important business to attend to, obligations he will be compelled to fulfil, things which will demand all of his time and attention. He will have commitments and responsibilities to society and to the state. Even if, as our country’s monarch, assuming he will eventually be elected, he says he loves you, as you believe he does, and affirms his love by asking you to marry him, this will still be subject to the approval of the people. Consider the pain and torment you will endure should you place too great a faith in the love he professes to feel for you now only for him to break your heart or for you to realise he’s simply using you to satisfy his undisciplined lust. I urge you to take heed of my advice and restrain your affections for him. Protect yourself from the heartache that trusting Hamlet’s protestations of love will cause you in the future. You do not need to submit to any of his demands, though even remaining virtuous does not escape slander. Youth is a time of optimism and idealism, yet our hopes and dreams so often prove despairingly unrealistic. Be wary then. In fear lies safety. Youth rebels, naturally, against itself. As we get older, our youthful ambitions change. Desires and intentions evolve and reform.

Ophelia I will keep in mind what you have told me; I know you have only my best interests at heart. But I ask that you do not, as some unprincipled men in your position do, insist that others be disciplined and self-sacrificing, harsh upon themselves for their own good, only to disregard their own advice, proudly and recklessly leading a libertine life, one of indulgence and dalliance.

Laertes Do not fear for me. I must leave now.
Enter Polonius

Here comes my father. A double blessing is a double grace. My departure is indeed a happy occasion.

**Polonius** Still here, Laertes? You’d better board your ship; they’re waiting for you. The winds are blowing favourably. My blessing goes with you and may these few precepts be engraved into your memory. Do not make your feelings known to others, or act imprudently or impulsively, without thinking through the consequences of your actions. With those you encounter on your travels, be affable but do not lower your standards by stooping to the level of those less estimable than yourself. Whatever friends you have, once their friendship has been tested and affirmed, keep them very close; but do not endeavour to make friends with every young man you meet. Beware of entering into a quarrel, but if this is unavoidable, ensure that you conduct yourself in such a way that your opponent is left wary of you and less than willing to confront you further. Listen to what other people have to say, but talk with few; be careful of revealing your own views and beliefs to others who may have very different ideas. Accept each man’s criticism, but reserve your own judgment. Your clothing is the most expensive money can buy, but it is not adorned with elaborate trimmings. It isn’t gaudy or exorbitant. A man’s clothing often reveals his character. French noblemen exhibit the height of good judgement and taste when it comes to their attire. Their clothes are the finest and most refined you’ll see. Neither a borrower nor a lender be, for loans often result in the loss of both what you lend and the friendship of those to whom you have lent, and borrowing impairs your ability manage your own finances with economy. Above all else, be true to yourself, and it must then follow, as surely as night follows day, that deceitfulness and dishonesty cannot be part of your character. Farewell. May my blessing fortify these precepts in you.

**Laertes** Most humbly do I take my leave, my lord.

**Polonius** Time is moving on, you’d better go.

**Laertes** Farewell, Ophelia, and remember well what I have said to you.

**Ophelia** It is sealed in my memory.

**Laertes** Farewell.

Exit Laertes.

**Polonius** What is it, Ophelia, that he has said to you?

**Ophelia** Something concerning Lord Hamlet.

**Polonius** Oh, yes, I remember. I’m told that of late he has very often spent a lot of time alone with you, and that you have listened most willingly and at length to what he has had to say. If this is so, as I am reliably informed it is, then I must warn you that you do not fully appreciate what is appropriate for my daughter as well as for your own honour. What is going on between you? Give me the truth.
Ophelia  He has, my lord, of late, made many declarations of his affection towards me.

Polonius  Affection? You speak of it like a green girl, inexperienced in such dangerous matters. Do you believe these declarations of affection to be sincere?

Ophelia  I do not know, my lord, what I should think.

Polonius  Marry (used to add emphasis to what one is saying), I will teach you. You may consider yourself to be about as worldly-wise as a young child seeing how you have mistakenly believed these protestations of love to be genuine, which, of course, they are not. You must be more careful in these affairs; otherwise it will look as though I have a fool for a daughter.

Ophelia  My lord, he has sought my love in an honourable fashion.

Polonius  Yes, fashion you may call it. Go on, go on.

Ophelia  And has sworn his feelings to be true.

Polonius  You have foolishly allowed yourself to be ensnared by mere words. I know, when feelings of passion burn, how profoundly such desires can compel a man to swear that his love is indeed earnest and heartfelt. These flaring passions, my daughter, may be ardent and true in outward appearance but are, in actuality, of little substance. You must not allow yourself to be deluded by such promises. From this time on, see Hamlet infrequently. Refuse to meet with him unless it is necessary. Lord Hamlet is young and he is someone who may conduct himself with less restriction than you. In short, Ophelia, do not believe his promises, for they are not what they would appear to be. Though he will endeavour to persuade you that they are real, his intention is to beguile you. This is all I have to say. In plain terms, from this time forth, I will not have you misuse your leisure by talking with Lord Hamlet. You are to comply with my wishes. Now come along.

Ophelia  I shall obey, my lord.

Scene 4  
(the castle grounds, at night)

Enter Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus

Hamlet  The air bites sharply, it is very cold.

Horatio  It is a bitter and keen air.

Hamlet  What hour is it now?  
Horatio  I think it’s just before twelve.

Marcellus  No, the hour has already struck.
Horatio Has it? I did not hear it. Then it draws near the time when the spirit walked before us.

* A flourish of trumpets and two pieces of ordnance go off *

What does this mean, my lord?

Hamlet The king stays up late tonight, carousing. He consumes alcohol and makes merry with abandon, carelessly parading his own self-indulgence, dancing in drunken revelry, with little sense of the dignity befitting of his position. And as he continues his incessant drinking, the kettle-drum and trumpets sound; a signal for the cannons to be fired in celebration.

Horatio Is it a custom?

Hamlet It is. But to my mind, though I am native here and well accustomed to this, it is a tradition we would do well not to observe at all. Such drunken revelling only invites disapproval upon us for it is unseemly; it demonstrates a considerable lack of decorum. It gains us a bad reputation from east to west. We’re criticised in other nations for this. They call us drunkards and pigs, soiling our good name. It detracts from the greatness of our achievements, lessening the estimation of their worth in the eyes of foreigners. Often, because of a severe defect in their character, perhaps a product of their birth, for which they are not then responsible, people will exhibit highly unreasonable and objectionable propensities, by which their otherwise decent character is diminished, so much so that, even if they have but a single defect, whether it be innate or acquired, despite whatever virtues they may have, even if they are as exemplary as you can get, their whole reputation is downgraded, corrupted by just that one particular fault. It takes only a small measure of evil to efface all of a person’s noble and admirable qualities.

Enter Ghost

Horatio Look, my lord, it comes.

Hamlet Angels and ministers of grace defend us! Whether you are an angel or a devil, coming from Heaven or from Hell, whether your intentions are wicked or charitable, the fact that you have appeared in this form invites questions which must be answered. I must therefore speak to you. I’ll call you Hamlet, King, father, royal Dane. O answer me. Do not allow me to be damned by my own ignorance, but tell me why your body, buried according to the canons of the Church, entombed in death, now walks free of its burial shroud; why the tomb in which we saw you after death has opened its ponderous, marble lid to return you to this world. For what purpose do you, a deceased corpse, once again in your full armour, revisit us in this manner, out here at night in this moonlit scene, causing us such fear, we who are human and subject to the weaknesses of our nature, rendering us so confounded and deeply disturbed? Tell me, why? I assume you require something of us. What duty or task would you have us perform? What should we do?

Ghost beckons
Horatio  It beckons you to go away with it, as if it wishes to impart something to you alone.

Marcellus  Look how it waves you towards more remote ground. But do not go with it.

Horatio  No, by no means.

Hamlet  It will not speak. Then I will follow it.

Horatio  Do not, my lord.

Hamlet  Why should I be afraid? My life is worth little, and as for my soul, what can it do to that, a thing as immortal as itself? It waves me forth again. I’ll follow it.

Horatio  What if it tempts you towards the flood, my lord, or to the treacherous summit of the cliff that overhangs the sea, and there assumes some other sinister form, showing itself to be an evil spirit which might deprive you of your reason, drawing you into madness? Think about it. That very place provokes thoughts of desperation and suicide, without any need for further motive, in the minds of everyone who merely looks over the edge at the great drop to the sea, hearing it roar beneath.

Hamlet  It waves me still. Go on, I’ll follow you.

Marcellus  You shall not go, my lord.

Hamlet  Take your hands away.

Horatio  Be warned, you shall not go.

Hamlet  My fate calls out to me, affording me resolve, hardening my courage. Still I am called. Unhand me, gentlemen. I swear I’ll kill anyone who impedes me. Take your hands off me. Go on, I’ll follow you (to ghost).

Exit Ghost and Hamlet

Horatio  He’s becoming increasingly desperate, losing his sense of reason.

Marcellus  Let’s follow. It would not be appropriate to obey his orders given his state of mind.

Horatio  Let’s follow him then. What could result from all of this?

Marcellus  Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

Horatio  Maybe we should simply leave it to fate.

Marcellus  No, we should go after him.
Scene 5

Enter Ghost and Hamlet

Hamlet To where are you leading me? Speak, I’ll go no further.

Ghost Listen to me.

Hamlet I will.

Ghost The hour is almost upon us when I must return to the tormenting fires of the spirit realm in which I dwell.

Hamlet Alas, poor ghost.

Ghost Do not pity me, but listen with intent to what I am about to impart.

Hamlet Speak, I am bound (by a sense of duty as a son) to listen.

Ghost I am thy father’s spirit, doomed for a certain term to walk the night, and for the day, confined to fast in fires until the sins committed during my life are burnt and purged away. But though I am forbidden to tell the secrets of my prison-house, I can relate a tale, the slightest suspicion of which would inflict great distress upon your soul, freeze your young blood, make your eyes burst from their sockets and your hair stand on end like the quills of a frightened porcupine. But no word of the immortal form you see before you in this coat of arms is to reach the ears of mortal men. Now listen, listen, you must listen. If you did ever love your dear father….

Hamlet O God!

Ghost Revenge his foul and most unnatural (violates a natural bond) murder.

Hamlet Murder!

Ghost Murder most foul, at best that is what it is, this most foul and unnatural crime.

Hamlet Tell me of it at once, that I as swift as thought, the thought of love, may sweep to my revenge.

Ghost I find you to be suited to the task. Yet you will be slower than the overgrowing weed that flourishes on Lethe (in Greek mythology, a river in the underworld from which the spirits of the dead drank to forget their earthly life) wharf since you will not act without much hesitation. Now, Hamlet, hear. While I was sleeping in my orchard, a serpent took my life - the whole of Denmark has been disgracefully deceived over my death - but you are to know, my noble son, the serpent that did take thy father’s life now wears his crown.
Hamlet  O my prophetic soul! My uncle!

Ghost  Yes, that incestuous, that adulterate beast; with his guileful wit, his traitorous gifts - wit so predisposed to wickedness, and such natural ability to charm and to seduce - won to satisfy his shameful lust the will of my most seemingly virtuous queen. O Hamlet, what despair and dismay this caused me. My love for her was of such worth that it went hand in hand with the dignity of the vows I made to her in marriage, and for her to lower herself so far as to marry a wretch whose natural qualities are so poor in comparison to my own. But good will never be undermined despite the efforts of evil seeking to entice people into wicked ways. I think I sense the morning air. I must be brief. I was sleeping in my orchard; something I always did in the afternoon; and while I was quite oblivious to his actions, your uncle stole into the garden with poison in a vial and into my ear did pour the liquid, a poison so lethal that, swift as quicksilver, it courses through the veins of the body and with a sudden vigour, like acid in milk, it thickens and curdles the blood. So did it mine. Instantly it ravaged my body turning my skin like that of a leper. And so was I, while sleeping, by my own brother’s hand, deprived of my life, of my crown, of my queen; taken from this life without having confessed and received absolution for my sins, dispatched from this world unprepared and sent before God for judgement with all of my sins, my imperfections, still on my head. O Horrible! Horrible! Most horrible! If you have any sense of justice do not condone it. Do not stand by and allow the royal bed of Denmark to be a bed of lust and damned incest. But however you pursue or respond to this, do not castigate or harbour any evil intent towards your mother. Leave her to the judgement of Heaven, and to the torment of her own conscience. Farewell then, I must leave at once. The glow-worm shows the morning to be near; the glow of its body, so noticeable in darkness, is beginning to fade in the light. Adieu, adieu. Remember me.

Exit Ghost

Hamlet  My God, am I to become an instrument of evil? Am I to lend myself to Hell? What am I to do to that I may right this injustice? I must calm myself and not become overwhelmed. I must remain strong and collected. Remember you (recalls the ghost’s last words)? Yes, you poor ghost, for as long as your memory has a place in my distracted mind. I’ll rid my mind of all its trivial and foolish memories, all the quotations from books, all the ideas, all of the impressions that the observations of my youth have placed there, and your commandment shall occupy my mind exclusively, undiluted by matters of lesser importance. It shall become my sole purpose. Yes, by Heaven! O most pernicious woman! The King a villain; a smiling, damned villain! One may put on an outward show of respectability, a façade behind which they are a villain. At least I’m sure this is so in Denmark, a place contaminated by corruption. So, uncle, there you are. I am charged with redressing your treachery and wickedness. I have sworn it.

Enter Horatio and Marcellus

Horatio  My lord, my lord (calling out).

Marcellus  Lord Hamlet.
Horatio  Heaven protect him.

Hamlet  So be it (aside).

Marcellus  Hello; my lord.

Hamlet  I’m over here.

Horatio  What news, my lord?

Hamlet  O, wonderful!

Horatio  Good my lord, tell us.

Hamlet  No, you will reveal it.

Horatio  I swear I will not.

Marcellus  Nor I, my lord.

Hamlet  People are naturally inclined to divulge secrets. But you will not?

Horatio and Marcellus  We swear it.

Hamlet  Never has there been such a villain dwelling in all Denmark; an arrant knave.

Horatio  Why should a ghost return from the grave to tell us this?

Hamlet  Why, right, you are in the right. And so without any further explanation at all I believe it fitting that we shake hands and part. You may go wherever your business or desire takes you, for every man has business and desire, such as it is. And as for me, I will go and pray.

Horatio  You’re not making any sense, my lord.

Hamlet  I am sorry you are offended; heartily, yes, heartily.

Horatio  There’s no offence, my lord.

Hamlet  Yes, by Saint Patrick (patron saint of Ireland, reputed to have experienced visions of Purgatory, Hell and the end of the world) there is, Horatio, and much offence too. Regarding this vision we have encountered, it is a genuine ghost (it is what it appears to be and not, as feared, an evil spirit in the guise of the dead King), let me tell you that. You must disregard any desire to know what transpired between us. And now, good friends, as you are friends, scholars, and soldiers, grant me one simple request.

Horatio  What is it, my lord? We will.
Hamlet  Never make known what you have seen tonight.

Horatio and Marcellus  My lord, we will not.

Hamlet  Swear it.

Horatio  I swear by my faith, my lord.

Marcellus  As do I, my lord, on my faith.

Hamlet  Upon my sword.

Marcellus  We have already sworn, my lord.

Hamlet  This sword’s guard forms a cross, sworn upon which the oath will be indisputable. Swear the oath upon my sword.

Ghost’s voice  Swear.

Hamlet  Come on, you hear its voice? Consent to swear.

Horatio  Propose the oath, my lord.

Hamlet  Never to speak of this that you have seen. Swear by my sword.

They clasp their hands around the hilt of the sword

Horatio and Marcellus  I swear.

Hamlet  Here and everywhere you go, you are bound by this oath. We’ll move away from here. Come over here, gentlemen, and lay your hands again upon my sword.

They comply

Swear by my sword never to speak of this that you have heard.

Ghost’s voice  Swear by his sword

Horatio and Marcellus  I swear.

Hamlet  Once more, let us move, good friends.

Horatio  O day and night, this is wondrously strange.

Hamlet  And as a stranger you must welcome it (in accordance with biblical teaching - Mathew: 25: 36: I was a stranger, and you brought me home). There are more things in Heaven and on Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of by your philosophers. But come, here, again.

They follow
Regardless of how strange or odd my behaviour may become - as I will perhaps assume an eccentric disposition - you must swear that you shall never, by some gesture or in pronouncing some curious phrase or ambiguous expression, suggest or intimate that you know anything whatsoever about it.

**Horatio and Marcellus** We swear, my lord.

**Hamlet** Rest perturbed spirit. So, gentlemen, I entrust myself to you; and as poor a man as I am I do it to express to you my love and friendship which, God willing, will not be found to be lacking. Let us go in together. And I pray that your lips remain sealed. This has all come at the wrong time. O damn this state of affairs, that it is my duty, my fate, to set it right. Come, let’s leave this place.
Act 2

Scene 1

(somewhere inside the castle)

Enter Polonius with his man Reynaldo

Polonius Give him this money and these letters, Reynaldo.

Reynaldo I will, my lord.

Polonius You’d be doing me a great service, Reynaldo, if before you visit him, you make a few not too conspicuous inquiries regarding what he’s doing.

Reynaldo My lord, I did intend it.

Polonius Ah, that’s good. Now, sir, firstly I’d like you to enquire as to what Danish nationals are, at present, in Paris; also, how they came to be there, who they are, how much money they have, where they lodge, what company they keep, and at what expense; and find out, in a discreet manner, whether they know my son. A less obvious approach will obtain you more information than if you were to go about asking specific questions. Assume that you have only some distant knowledge of him, as though you know his father, and his friends, and, in some small way, him. Do you understand, Reynaldo?

Reynaldo Yes, my lord.

Polonius ‘In some small way. But’, you may say, ‘not well; but if it’s the person I mean, he’s very wild and ebullient’, and make whatever false accusations about him you please, but nothing so disgraceful as to dishonour him, take heed of that, just the usual faults of someone his age, the kind of wanton and wild behaviour normally associated with youth and liberty.

Reynaldo As gaming, my lord?

Polonius Ay, or drinking, fencing, swearing, quarrelling, frequenting prostitutes, but you may only go so far.

Reynaldo My lord, that would dishonour him.

Polonius Not really, you can moderate whatever you allege about him. You must not put any scandal on him, do not create the impression that he is predisposed to overindulgence and debauchery, that’s not what I mean. Just mention his faults in a charming and fanciful way, as though this is all simply the wildness and exuberance of youth, the typical behaviour of a young man who has been granted his freedom.

Reynaldo But my good lord.
Polonius  For what purpose would I have you do this?

Reynaldo  Yes, my lord, I would appreciate knowing that.

Polonius  Well, sir, here’s my strategy, and I believe it is quite legitimate. When you engage someone in conversation, whoever you think it appropriate to talk with, and you happen to mention my son, and you claim these mildly disparaging, disreputable things of him, enquiring as to whether they have ever witnessed him behaving in the aforementioned manner, displaying such youthful recklessness and indiscipline; make sure they’re reliable and honest people. Be assured that their language naturally employs the following terms: ‘good sir’ or ‘friend’ or ‘gentleman’, according to their customary style or form of address, depending on where they are from.

Reynaldo  Very good, my lord.

Polonius  And then, sir, does, does….. what was I about to say? By the Mass (used to add emphasis to what one is saying), I was about to say something. Where did I leave off?

Reynaldo  At ‘make sure they naturally employ the following terms’.

Polonius  ‘Make sure they naturally employ the following terms’, yes, of course. They will reveal the information you wish to elicit, responding with something like: ‘I know the gentleman, I saw him yesterday’, or ‘the other day’, and then, ‘and as you say, he was gambling’, or ‘he was the worse for drinking’, or perhaps ‘I saw him enter a house of sale’, a brothel, and so forth. So you see now, your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth; you’re suggesting various things about him to prompt them to reveal what they know. And in this way us men of wisdom and experience can, by such devious means, with manipulative and indirect questioning, discover the truth. So in accordance with my lecture and advice you shall carry out this assignment. You have understood me have you not?

Reynaldo  My lord, I have.

Polonius  God be with you, farewell.

Reynaldo  Good, my lord.

Polonius  Go along with whatever he wishes to do.

Reynaldo  I shall, my lord.

Polonius  And let him work at his music.

Reynaldo  I will do my duty, my lord.

  Exit Reynaldo

  Enter Ophelia
Polonius  Farewell. Well now, Ophelia, what’s the matter?

Ophelia  O my lord, my lord, I was so affrighted.

Polonius  Of what, in the name of God?

Ophelia  My lord, as I was sewing in my closet, Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced, no hat upon his head (it was customary for gentlemen to wear hats at all times), his stockings around his ankles, his face as pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other and with a look which seemed so piteous, as if he’d been released from Hell to speak of its horrors, he came before me.

Polonius  Mad for thy love?

Ophelia  My lord, I do not know, but truly I do fear it.

Polonius  What did he say?

Ophelia  He took me by the wrist and held me hard. Then he backed away, holding me at his arm’s length, and with his other hand like this (demonstrates) over his brow he made such a perusal of my face it was as though he wanted to draw it, so long was the time he spent doing this. Then finally, with a little shake of my arm, and waving his head up and down three times in this manner (demonstrates), he released a sigh so piteous and profound that it seemed to shatter his whole body and end his being, as though he were consumed by utter despondency. After that he let me go and with his head turned, constantly looking back over his shoulder, he seemed to find his way without looking where he was going as he left my room, and until the last moment fixed his gaze upon me.

Polonius  Come with me, I will go and seek the King. This is the very madness of love, which by its own violent nature destroys itself, driving men to desperate undertakings with a compulsion comparable to any instinct that afflicts our nature. I am sorry; have you spoken harshly to him of late?

Ophelia  No, my lord, but as you did command, I returned his letters and denied him access to me.

Polonius  That has made him mad. I regret that I have not been more attentive of him. I feared he was merely trifling and meant to ruin you. But curse my suspicions! By Heaven, it is as typical for men of my age to be as ill-judged and unreasonable in our opinions as it is common for younger men to lack discretion. Come, we will go to the King. This must be made known; if we keep it to ourselves, hiding it from him now might eventually cause more trouble than would our revealing it forthwith. Come.

Scene 2

(the King’s court)
Enter King, Queen, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern with Attendants

King Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Despite the fact that we did very much long to see you, our need for your services meant that we were forced to send you away with haste. You will have heard something of Hamlet’s transformation, as I call it, since his character bears little resemblance to what it used to be. What it could be, besides his father’s death, that has affected him this way I cannot imagine. I entreat that you both, having been brought up alongside Hamlet from an early age, and being so familiar with his behaviour, with the type of person he is, accede to remain here in our court for a short while and keep company with him, inviting him to socialise with you in order that you may determine whether there is anything troubling him about which we do not know that, if revealed to us, we can remedy.

Queen Good gentlemen, he has talked much of you, and I am sure there are no two men living to whom he is inclined to stay closer. If it will please you to show us such courtesy and good will as to spend some time with us in the hope that we can profit from this, your visit shall receive such gratitude as befits a king’s remembrance.

Rosencrantz Both your Majesties might, by the sovereign power you have over us, command rather than entreat us to carry out your revered wishes.

Guildenstern But we both obey, and will serve you willingly to the best of our abilities.

King Thank you, gentlemen.

Queen Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz. And I beseech you to visit my son right away. Escort these gentlemen to where Hamlet is (to a court Attendant).

Guildenstern May Heaven make our presence and our actions pleasant and helpful to him.

Queen Yes, let us hope so.

Exit Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and an Attendant

Enter Polonius

Polonius Our ambassadors from Norway, my good lord, have returned. They have been successful.

King You have always been the bearer of good news.

Polonius Have I, my lord? I assure my good liege I hold my duty to yourself as I hold matters of the soul; obligations to my God and to my gracious King are of equal concern; and I do think, or else this brain of mine is not as perceptive, not as capable of appreciating what’s going on as it used to be, that I have found the very cause of Hamlet’s lunaey.

King Speak of it; that I do long to hear.
Polonius  Firstly, admit the ambassadors. My news shall be the fruit to that great feast (his news about Hamlet should be heard after that of the ambassadors, which is of far greater importance).

King  You may bring them in.

   Exit Polonius

He tells me, my dear Gertrude, he has found the source of your son’s disordered state of mind.

Queen  I doubt the main reason is anything other than his father’s death and our overly hasty marriage.

King  Well, we shall question Polonius.

   Enter Polonius, Voltemand and Cornelius

Welcome my good friends. Tell us, Voltemand, what news you have from the King of Norway?

Voltemand  Our greetings and desires were reciprocated. As soon as we informed him of our business there, he initiated measures to suppress the activities of his nephew, who he was under the impression was raising an army to wage war against the King of Poland; but on looking more closely into the matter he found it was against your Highness. Regretting that his sickness, age and frailty had been taken advantage of and that he had been deceived, he sent out to Fortinbras an official order forbidding him from furthering this purpose, which he, in short, obeyed, receiving rebuke from the King, and finally swearing before his uncle that he will never again endeavour to take up arms against your Majesty; whereupon the King, quite pleased at the opportunity which presented itself, gave him three thousand crowns in annual fee, together with his commission to employ the army he had raised against the King of Poland, with an entreaty, detailed herein (hands over document), that you allow him safe passage through your kingdom for this enterprise, in accordance with the terms set out in the document.

King  This is pleasing news; and when we have more time to consider it we’ll deal with this business. In the meantime, we thank you for such fruitful work. Go and rest, at night we’ll feast together.

   Exit Voltemand and Cornelius

Polonius  This business is now concluded. My liege and madam, to consider what it should mean to hold sovereign power, what duty is, why day is day, night night, and time is time, only for us to waste them. Therefore, since brevity is the soul of intellect, and tediousness the limbs and outward characteristics, I will be brief. Your noble son is mad. ‘Madness’ I call it, for how is true madness to be recognised or defined when it is said that it’s the whole world which is mad, except to say that it is simply madness? But we’ll drop that subject.
Queen It would be preferable for you to express what you mean in less elaborate terms.

Polonius Madam, I swear I use no elaborateness at all. That he is mad is true, quite true; a pity, but true. A foolish figure, but disregard it, for I will use no elaborate terms. Mad let us declare him to be then. And now it remains for us to ascertain the cause of this effect, or rather the cause of this defect, for this affliction has a cause. The cause is this: pay heed, I have a daughter, mine until she is married, who in her duty and obedience, has given me this. Now make of it what you will. (begins reading a letter from Hamlet to Ophelia) To the celestial and my soul’s idol, the most beautified Ophelia, that’s an ill phrase, a vile phrase, ‘beautified’ is a vile phrase, it implies cosmetic enhancement. But you shall hear, (resumes reading) these; in her excellent white bosom, these, and he clearly intends that the letter be something she treasures.

Queen And this was sent to her by Hamlet?

Polonius Good madam, if you will permit me to read on, that answer will come. (resumes reading) Doubt that the stars are fire, doubt that the sun doth move, doubt truth to be a liar, but never doubt I love. O dear Ophelia, I am ill at these numbers. I have not art to reckon my groans. But that I love thee best, o most best, believe it. Adieu. Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst my body belongs to me, Hamlet. This, in obedience, my daughter has shown me and, furthermore, has told me of his solicitations, as they occurred, of what took place and where she was at the time.

King But how has she received his love?

Polonius What do you think of me?

King You are a man who is faithful and honourable.

Polonius I would very much hope I am able to prove so. But what might you think, when I had been aware of this passionate love going on, as I had noticed it, I must admit to you, before my daughter told me anything; what might you or my dear Majesty your queen think if I had simply sat working at my desk and paid this no attention, not looking upon his love with such perceptiveness and understanding, what might you think? But no, I went to work immediately and said to my young mistress: “Lord Hamlet is a prince of higher birth. This must not be,” and then gave her prescripts that she was to refrain from meeting with him, to admit no messengers and to receive no gifts. After doing this, she did what I advised and Hamlet, repelled, to put it briefly, sank into a state of depression, subsequently losing his appetite and suffering insomnia, then weakness, then delirium; all of the symptoms classically associated with unrequited love; before finally declining into the madness he now manifests and for which we all mourn.

King Do you think this is what it is?

Queen It may well be.
Polonius  Has there ever been a time, I would very much like to know if there has, that I have positively said that something is so, only for it to prove otherwise?

King  Not that I know.

Polonius  I’ll stake my life on it. If circumstances permit me, I will probe more deeply into this matter.

King  How may we test your deduction further?

Polonius  You know that he sometimes walks for several hours here in the lobby.

Queen  He does indeed.

Polonius  At such a time I’ll loose my daughter to him, while you and I remain behind an arras and observe the encounter. If he loves her not, and I am wrong about the reason underlying his madness, then I will be no minister of state. I will renounce my position and go and keep a farm instead.

King  We will try it.

Enter Hamlet reading a book

Queen  But look where, studiously, the poor wretch comes reading.

Polonius  Away, I do beseech you both to leave. I’ll accost him presently. You must hurry.

Exit King, Queen and Attendants

How is my Lord Hamlet?

Hamlet  Well, God have mercy on you.

Polonius  Do you know me, my lord?

Hamlet  Excellent well. You are a fishmonger.

Polonius  Not I, my lord.

Hamlet  Then I would say you were an honest man.

Polonius  Honest, my lord?

Hamlet  Ay, sir. To be honest in this world is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.

Polonius  That’s very true, my lord.
Hamlet (reading from his book) For if the sun breed maggots in a dead dog, being a good kissing carrion (a carcass for the sun to shine on (kiss, as in 'sun-kissed')). Have you a daughter?

Polonius I have, my lord.

Hamlet Let her not go around in public. Conception is a blessing but as your daughter may conceive, friend, be attentive to it.

Polonius (aside) What do you mean by that? Still harping on about my daughter. Yet he knew me not, at first, saying I was a fishmonger. He is far gone. And truly in my own youth I suffered intensely for love, very much like this. I’ll speak to him again. What do you read, my lord?

Hamlet Words, words, words.

Polonius What is the matter, my lord?

Hamlet Between who?

Polonius I mean the matter that you read, my lord.

Hamlet Slanders, sir. For the satirical rogue says here that old men have grey beards, that their faces are wrinkled, their eyes exuding thick amber and plum-tree gum, and that they have a plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak thighs; all of which, sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, I consider improper to have thus set down. For you, sir, shall grow as old as I am, if like a crab you could go backward.

Polonius Though this be madness, there is method in it (aside). Will you come out of the air, my lord?

Hamlet Into my grave?

Polonius Indeed, that’s out of the air. (aside) How pregnant sometimes his replies are. His madness often hits upon certain truths, which could not be expressed so well by a reasoned and sane mind. I will leave him and immediately contrive a meeting between him and my daughter. My lord, I will take my leave of you.

Hamlet You cannot, sir, take from me anything that I will more willingly part with; except my life, except my life, except my life (except for freedom from this life, and the suffering it entails, he is saying he would like nothing better than for Polonius to go away).

Polonius Farewell, my lord.

Hamlet These tedious old fools (aside as Polonius is leaving).

Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Polonius You're seeking Lord Hamlet. There he is.
Rosencrantz  God save you, sir.

Exit Polonius

Guildenstern  My honoured lord.

Rosencrantz  My most dear lord.

Hamlet  My good friends. How are you Guildenstern? Ah, Rosencrantz. How are you both?

Rosencrantz  We can’t complain.

Guildenstern  Happy in ourselves, but not overly happy. We are not unusually or especially fortunate; certainly not at the very top of Fortune’s cap.

Hamlet  Nor on the soles of her shoe?

Rosencrantz  Neither, my lord.

Hamlet  Then you live about her waist, in the middle of Fortune’s favours?

Guildenstern  Yes, at her private parts, we do.

Hamlet  In the secret parts of Fortune? O Fortune is most fickle. What news?

Rosencrantz  None, my lord, but the world has grown more honest.

Hamlet  Then doomsday is near. But your news is not true. Let me ask a more specific question. What have you done, my good friends, that you deserve, at the hands of Fortune, being sent here to this prison?

Guildenstern  Prison, my lord?

Hamlet  Denmark’s a prison.

Rosencrantz  Then the whole world is one.

Hamlet  A quite large one, in which there are many confines, cells and dungeons, Denmark being one of the worst.

Rosencrantz  We do not agree, my lord.

Hamlet  Why, then it is simply not to you; for nothing is intrinsically either good or bad, it is our perception of it that makes it what it is. To me, it is a prison.

Rosencrantz  Why, then is it your ambition to make it one. Such thinking is too narrow for your mind.
Hamlet  O God, I could be enclosed within a nutshell and count myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

Guildenstern  Dreams are indeed ambition; for the very achievements of the ambitious are merely the shadows of what they dream, of what they truly desire.

Hamlet  What we can accomplish is but a shadow of what we can dream.

Rosencrantz  Truly, and I regard ambition to be so immaterial and unreal that in practical terms it is but a shadow’s shadow.

Hamlet  Then real people, people of substance, must be the beggars, those without any realistic ambitions, while the truly ambitious, our monarchs and heroes, are merely their shadows. Shall we proceed to the court? For, by my faith, I can reason this argument no further.

Rosencrantz  We’ll escort you.

Hamlet  I’ll not hear of it. I do not regard you as my servants; for, to speak to you as an honest man, I am most dreadfully attended. But if I may address you as friends, for what reason have you come to Elsinore?

Rosencrantz  To visit you, my lord, no other occasion.

Hamlet  Beggar that I am, I am even poor in thanks, but I thank you. And sure, dear friends, my thanks are not worth a halfpenny. Were you not sent for? Are you really here of your own volition? Come, come, be honest with me. Come, tell me.

Guildenstern  What should we say, my lord?

Hamlet  You’re probably inclined to tell me anything but your real purpose. You were sent for, and there is a kind of confession in your looks which, though you are discreet, you have not the craft to disguise. I know the good King and Queen have sent for you.

Rosencrantz  To what end, my lord?

Hamlet  That I have yet to learn. But let me ask you quite seriously, by the rights of our fellowship, by the agreement of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love, and by what one of your closest and most loyal friends can ask of you, to be truthful and direct with me as to whether or not you were sent for.

Rosencrantz  What shall we tell him (aside to Guildenstern)?

Hamlet  I’m watching you. (he is highly suspicious of their motives) If you love me, do not keep the truth from me.

Guildenstern  My lord, we were sent for.
Hamlet  I will tell you why. You need not disclose anything; I have anticipated your purpose so your obligation of secrecy to the King and Queen need not be breeched. I have of late, but for what reason I know not, lost all my cheerfulness. I have forgone all my usual exercises; and indeed, I am in such a profoundly dejected state that this whole country seems to me nothing more than a large and sterile mass of land which juts out into the sea. Look at this immense canopy of air, this magnificent firmament overhanging us, this majestic roof (observing the sky) adorned with golden fire (the sun); why, it appears as nothing to me but a place of foulness and pestilence, of infectious diseases borne by the very air which surrounds us. What a masterpiece of work man is; how superbly we can reason, how infinite in faculties we are, how admirable in form and skilful in action; in apprehension, how like a god. Look at the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals; and yet, to me, what is any of this but the quintessence of dust (biblical allusion: Genesis: 3: 19: dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return). I have little faith in humanity. In man I find no source of encouragement or inspiration, nor in woman neither; though by your smiling it seems you think otherwise.

Rosencrantz  My lord, I thought no such thing.

Hamlet  Then why did you laugh when I said ‘in man I find no source of encouragement’?

Rosencrantz  To think, my lord, if you are not gladdened or encouraged by man, what a poor reception the players shall receive from you. We overtook them on the way; they’re coming here to offer you their service. (Hamlet is delighted by this news)

Hamlet  He that plays the king shall be welcome; ‘his Majesty’ shall receive tribute from me; the adventurous knight shall use his sword and shield, the lover will have good reason to feel sadness; the passionate man shall end his part having overcome the obstacles before him; the clown (actor who performs the comic roles) shall amuse those who are easily entertained, and the lady shall speak her mind freely, or the blank verse shall falter for it (he is referring to the standard characters of an acting company). What players are they?

Rosencrantz  You know them well; they are the tragedians (actors who specialise in tragedies) of London.

Hamlet  Why are they touring? Their home theatre, both in reputation and profit, was a more favourable venue for their performances.

Rosencrantz  I believe they’re no longer able to perform there due to a recent uprising.

Hamlet  Do they command the same degree of respect and admiration as when I was in the city? Are they enjoying the same level of popularity?

Rosencrantz  No, indeed they are not.

Hamlet  How is this so? Are they out of practice?
Rosencrantz  No, their effort and commitment maintains their exceptionally high standards; but there is, sir, a number of young children; they’re like young hawks that squawk noisily and incessantly, their voices louder and higher in pitch than anyone else and they’re applauded most immoderately for it. These are now the fashion and so spoil the common stages (public theatres), as they call them, that many gentlemen actors hardly dare to perform on them for fear of being ridiculed in material penned for these child actors.

Hamlet  Who looks after these children? How are they provided for? Will they still pursue the profession after their voices have deepened and they can no longer sing as they do when they are young? Will they not then say, should they graduate to ordinary acting, as is most likely if they can find no better means of earning a living, that the playwrights are doing them a disservice? They will have cause to protest against this situation.

Rosencrantz  Well, there has been much rivalry between the private companies using child actors and the companies which employ adult actors to perform in the public theatres; and audiences are not opposed to the incitement of controversy. For a while, plays tended not to attract large audiences unless there was some controversy, unless, because of this issue, a play had become the centre of a dispute between the writer and the actors.

Hamlet  That’s unbelievable.

Rosencrantz  Both sides have had to rely greatly upon their cunning and ingenuity to try and protect their own interests.

Hamlet  Were the child actors successful?

Rosencrantz  Yes they were, my lord. This has also adversely affected companies which perform at the Globe Theatre (Shakespeare’s own acting company, the Chamberlain’s Men, later called the King’s Men, performed at the Globe Theatre in London).

Hamlet  The fickleness of public tastes and preference is something I’m used to; for my uncle is King of Denmark, and those who never admired or respected him while my father lived are now prepared to pay twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, even a hundred ducats apiece for his picture in miniature. God’s blood, there is something of a metaphysical nature in this, if only philosophy could determine it.

A flourish of trumpets

Guildenstern  Here are the players.

Hamlet  Gentlemen, you are welcome to Elsinore (to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern). Your hands; come then (shakes hands with them). This accompaniment of welcome is customary practice. Let me welcome you in this way lest the greetings I extend to the players, which I tell you will be ardent, might appear warmer than those I have
shown you. You are most welcome. But my uncle-father and my aunt-mother are deceived.

**Guildenstern** In what way, my lord?

**Hamlet** If the mind of a madman is influenced by the weather then I am only mad when the wind blows north-north-west. When the wind is southerly, I am as balanced and reasonable as any man.

*Enter Polonius*

**Polonius** How do you do, gentlemen.

**Hamlet** Listen, Guildenstern, and you too; listen carefully. That great baby you see there is not yet out of his swaddling-clothes.

**Rosencrantz** Perhaps he is wearing them for the second time, for they say an old man has become a child for a second time.

**Hamlet** I predict he has come to inform me of the players. Mark it. You are correct, sir, a Monday morning, it was then indeed (pretends to be engaged in conversation).

**Polonius** My lord, I have news to tell you.

**Hamlet** My lord, I have news to tell you. When Roscius (one of the greatest actors in ancient Rome) was an actor in Rome…..

**Polonius** The actors are here, my lord.

**Hamlet** Really (he is contemptuous towards Polonius, who has brought him news of which he is already well aware)?

**Polonius** Upon my honour.

**Hamlet** Then each actor arrived on his ass.

**Polonius** They are the best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, plays centred on a single location and plays where the action moves between a number of places. Seneca (the plays of Seneca, one of the most eminent Roman playwrights), cannot be too tragic, nor Plautus (Roman comic dramatist, who enjoyed huge popular appeal), too comical. Whether performing a play of a serious nature, one which is true-to-life, or whether it is something done with more artistic licence, these are the only actors to see.

**Hamlet** O Jephthah, judge of Israel (in the Bible - Judges: 11: 30 - 40, Jephthah sacrificed his only daughter, who died unwed, in order to fulfil the vow he had made to God); what a treasure he had.

**Polonius** What a treasure he had, my lord?
Hamlet  Why (quotes from a ballad about Jephthah),
One fair daughter and no more,
The which he loved passing well.

Polonius  Still on about my daughter (aside).

Hamlet  Am I not correct, old Jephthah?

Polonius  If you call me Jephthah, my lord, I do have a daughter that I love very much.

Hamlet  No, that does not follow.

Polonius  What follows then, my lord?

Hamlet  Why (resumes quoting), as by lot God wot, the next line you know, it came to pass, as most like it was. The first stanza of this religious ballad will show you more; this diversion is abridged, for look, here come the players.

Enter the Players

You are welcome, masters. Welcome, all. I am glad to see you are well. Welcome, good friends. O, old friend, why, you’ve grown a beard since I saw you last. Have you come to beard (oppose or confront) me in Denmark? What, my young lady and mistress (greets the boy actor who assumes the female roles)! By Our Lady, your ladyship is nearer to Heaven than when I saw you last, by several inches. Pray God your voice be not, as it would had it grown deeper, like a gold coin cracked within the ring and thus no longer of value. Masters, you are all welcome. It is my intention that we endeavour, like French falconers, to hunt a particular quarry. We’ll have a speech straight away. Come, give us a taste of your quality. Let us hear a passionate speech.

First Player  What speech, my lord?

Hamlet  I heard you deliver a speech once, but it was never performed publicly, or if it was, not more than once, for the play, I remember, was not seen by a mass audience; it was staged privately for those of high social standing. But it was considered by both myself, and others, whose judgement in such matters is superior to mine, an excellent play; well organised, without too much grandeur, yet written with skill and ingenuity. I remember someone saying it did not rely on any lewd or salacious material, nor any fancy language which might invite accusations of affectation; rather it was all quite serious, wholesome and enjoyable, and performed with such natural ability, such talent. One of the speeches in it I particularly liked was the story Aeneas told to Dido, especially when he speaks about Priam’s murder. (he refers to characters in Greek mythology; the odyssey of Aeneas is the subject of the Roman poet Virgil’s Aeneid) If you still remember it, begin at this line; let me see, let me see, the rugged Pyrrhus, like the Hyrcanian beast; no that’s not right. It begins with Pyrrhus -
The rugged Pyrrhus, he whose sable arms,
Black as his purpose, did the night resemble
When he lay couched in the ominous horse,
Hath now this dread and black complexion smeared
With heraldry more dismal. Head to foot
Now is he total gules, horridly tricked
With blood of fathers, mothers, daughters, sons,
Baked and impasted with the parching streets,
That lend a tyrannous and damned light
To their lord’s murder. Roasted in wrath and fire,
And thus oversized with coagulate gore,
With eyes like carbuncles, the hellish Pyrrhus
Old grandshire Priam seeks.
So you continue it.

Polonius Well spoken, my lord, with good intonation and an accomplished style.

First Player
Anon he finds him,
Striking too short at Greeks. His antique sword,
Rebellious to his arm, lies where it falls,
Repugnant to command. Unequal matched,
Pyrrhus at Priam drives, in rage strikes wide;
But with the whiff and wind of his fell sword
The unnerved father falls. Then senseless Ilium,
Seeming to feel this blow, with flaming top
Stoops to his base, and with a hideous crash
Takes prisoner Pyrrhus’ ear. For lo, his sword,
Which was declining on the milky head
Of reverend Priam, seemed in the air to stick;
So, as a painted tyrant, Pyrrhus stood,
And like a neutral to his will and matter,
Did nothing.
But as we often see against some storm
A silence in the heavens, the rack stand still,
The bold wind speechless, and the orb below
As hush as death, anon the dreadful thunder
Doth rend the region; so after Pyrrhus’ pause
Aroused vengeance sets him new awork,
And never did the Cyclops’ hammers fall
On Mars’s armour, forged for proof eterne,
With less remorse than Pyrrhus’ bleeding sword
Now falls on Priam.
Out, out, thou strumpet Fortune! All you Gods
In general synod take away her power,
Break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel,
And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven
As low as to the fiends.

Polonius This is too long.
Hamlet  It shall be to the barbers with your beard. Prithee (used to introduce a request) carry on. He wants to see a jig or a tale which contains vulgar and lewd language, otherwise he’s bored. Carry on; move on to the part about Hecuba.

First Player  
But who - ah woe - had seen the mobbled queen…..

Hamlet  ‘The mobbled queen’?

Polonius  That’s good.

First Player  
Run barefoot up and down, threatening the flames
With bisson rheum, a clout upon that head
Where late the diadem stood, and, for a robe,
About her lank and all overteemed loins
A blanket, in the alarm of fear caught up;
Who this had seen, with tongue in venom steeped,
Against Fortune’s state would treason have pronounced.
But if the gods themselves did see her then,
When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport
In mincing with his sword her husband’s limbs,
The instant burst of clamour that she made,
Unless things mortal move them not at all,
Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven
And passion in the gods.

Polonius  Look how his face has paled; there are tears in his eyes (speaking of Hamlet). Please, no more.

Hamlet  It’s all right. I’ll have you speak the rest of this soon. Will you see that the players are well accommodated (to Polonius)? Do you hear? Make sure they are well treated, for they know all the major plays of our time. It would be preferable for you to have a bad epitaph after your death than their disfavour while you live.

Polonius  My lord, I will treat them according to what they deserve.

Hamlet  By God, man, you’ll treat them much better. Treat them according to what they deserve, as you see it, and they could be perceived as vagabonds and receive a whipping. Treat them as you would a person of your own privilege and high rank; the less they deserve, the more generosity you can show them. Take them in.

Polonius  Come, sirs.

Hamlet  Follow him, friends. We’ll hear a play tomorrow. Listen, old friend (to First Player, attracting his attention). Can you perform The Murder of Gonzago?

First Player  Yes, my lord.
Hamlet  We’ll have it tomorrow night. You could, if required, learn a speech of some
double to sixteen lines, which I would write down and insert into it, could you not?

First Player  Yes, my lord.

Hamlet  Very well. Follow that lord, and be sure not to mock him (to all of the
Players).

Exit Polonius and Players

My good friends, we’ll part company until tonight. You are welcome in Elsinore.

Rosencrantz  Very good, my lord.

Exit Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Hamlet  Yes, goodbye to you. Now I am alone. O, what a dishonourable and
scheming slave I am! Is it not monstrous that one of these actors could, in a fiction,
feigning emotion, display passion so convincingly, with such mastery, that the colour
would drain from their face, that they would have tears in their eyes, anguish
conveyed in their look, their voice broken and faltering? And all for nothing! Just to
represent some character who experiences tragedy; to show us their torment, their
grief. But what’s that individual to the actor, or he to them, that he should weep for
them? What would the actor do had he the motive, the provocation, for passion that I
have? He would drown the stage with tears, and deafen everyone with horrifying
revelations which would make mad the guilty and appal the innocent; confound the
ignorant, those oblivious to any notion or inkling of the truth, and amaze indeed the
very faculties of eyes and ears. Yet here am I, dull and lacking in strength of
character; indecisive, irresolute; like someone obsessed by their own dreams and
imaginings rather than being spurred into action for my cause, and can say nothing;
no, not about my father upon whose body and most dear life such a terrible death was
inflicted. Am I a coward? Who would call me a villain or attack me, pluck off my
beard and blow it in my face, mock and insult me, or accuse me of being a downright
liar? Who would do this to me? By God’s wounds, I would take it if they did, for it is
not my true nature to allow abuse or harsh treatment to give rise to bitter feeling or
resentment. I would rather fatten all of the region’s kites (small, slim hawks) with my
own flesh. Bloody, depraved villain (turning his attention to the King)! Remorseless,
treacherous, lecherous, villain; vile enough to murder his brother to further his own
selfish ambitions! What a fool I am! It is most admirable that I, the son of a dear
father murdered, prompted to my revenge by Heaven and Hell, reduced to committing
an act of evil, though for an honourable cause, must, as might anyone who would do
something immoral because it is necessary, pour out my feelings with words; that I
seek to assure myself that mine is a righteous course and fall cursing at my destiny.
Fie (expresses annoyance or disgust) upon it! I must consider this most carefully. I
have heard of guilty men who, while watching a play, have by the very way in which
a particular scene is presented been so struck by their own conscience as to
immediately proclaim their crimes. Murder, perpetrated in secret and otherwise
remaining concealed, is suddenly and manifestly exposed. I’ll have these actors play
out before my uncle something like the murder of my father. I’ll observe his facial
expressions, his reactions; I’ll probe his deepest, most guarded and private emotions.
If he reacts, if he should blench, I will have confirmed the course I must take. The ghost I have seen may be an evil spirit, possessing, as evil spirits do, the power to assume a familiar and pleasing form, and is perhaps taking advantage of my depressed and melancholy state, as its power to exploit such moods would be very potent, to tempt me into evil and lead me to my eternal damnation. I’ll have more substantial grounds for pursuing action than what this spirit alone has told me. The play’s the thing wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King.

Act 3

Scene 1

(somewhere inside the castle)

*Enter* King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

**King** And have you been unable to determine through general conversation with him why he exhibits this apparently confused frame of mind, why he’s so irritable, spending all his time alone in this disordered and dangerous state?

**Rosencrantz** He does confess to feeling distracted, but by what cause he will not speak.

**Guildenstern** Nor have we found him amenable to questioning. With his cunning display of madness he remains aloof when we endeavour to elicit some confession of his true state.

**Queen** Did he receive you well?

**Rosencrantz** Most like a gentleman.

**Guildenstern** But exaggerating this style of behaviour he has adopted.

**Rosencrantz** Though reluctant to answer our questions directly he did speak most freely in reply.

**Queen** Did you persuade him to engage in any pastime?

**Rosencrantz** Madam, we happened to pass a certain company of actors on our way to see him. We told him of their arrival and he seemed delighted by this. They are here somewhere in the court and I believe they have already been requested to play before him tonight.
**Polonius** It is most true. And he beseeched me to entreat your Majesties to come and watch what they are going to perform.

**King** To be quite honest, it pleases me greatly that he is inclined to do this. Good gentlemen, give him further encouragement in pursuing these interests.

**Rosencrantz** We shall, my lord.

*Exit Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*

**King** Sweet Gertrude, I’d like you to leave us too, for we have sent for Hamlet that he may come here and, as though it were by accident, meet and confront Ophelia. Her father and myself will, quite justifiably, be spying on them. We’ll hide ourselves away so that, observing unseen, we may carefully judge and attain further insight into Hamlet’s state of mind. We’ll assess from his behaviour whether or not it is indeed the affliction of love that he suffers from.

**Queen** I shall obey you. And I do hope, Ophelia, that you are indeed the cause of Hamlet’s wildness. I hope your virtues will restore him to his normal, rational state. I wish you both the best.

**Ophelia** Madam, I hope this will be so.

*Exit Queen*

**Polonius** Ophelia, come over here. Your Grace, if it pleases you, we will hide ourselves. (to Ophelia) Be reading this prayer book. This will serve to explain your being here by yourself. I suppose we can often be accused of this. It’s all too evident that most of us are really only concerned with outward displays of virtue and religious devotion, while, beneath the surface, as our true selves we are far less concerned with being genuinely honourable and moral in our actions.

**King** (aside) O, this is too true. How sharp a lash that speech has given my conscience. Even a harlot’s face, beautified with cosmetics, is less ugly than my deed. O, this is a heavy burden!

**Polonius** I hear him coming. Let’s withdraw, my lord.

*Exit King and Polonius*

**Enter Hamlet**

**Hamlet** To be or not to be, that is the question; whether it is nobler to endure the torment of my outrageous misfortune and to go on living as I am, or to combat this sea of troubles and, by opposing, end them, and possibly in doing so end my own life. To die, to sleep, to be no more; but who’s to say that will bring an end to the heartache and the many natural tragedies inherent in the flesh, which is most earnestly desired? To die, to sleep; to sleep, perchance to dream; yet there’s the problem; for in that sleep of death the dreams that may come, when we are free of this earthly existence, must give us pause. It is respect for this, fear of what we may face in the
next world, that makes us tolerate the adversity and misfortune of this life for so long. For who would otherwise endure the problems, the afflictions and the suffering of this world, the oppressor’s harsh and cruel treatment, the insults and disdain of the conceited, the pangs of unrequited love, the inefficiency and inadequacy of the law, the insolence of those in office, the contemptuous rejections the worthy take from the unworthy, who might themselves be inclined to settle matters with a dagger? Who would bear such burdens, who would grunt and sweat under the strain of such a weary life were it not that the dread of what may await us after death, in the afterlife, the undiscovered country, from beyond whose border no traveller returns, makes us prefer to confront the difficulties we have rather than potentially encounter others of which we have no knowledge and which could indeed prove less desirable even than those of this world? Thus conscience makes cowards of us all, and so our resolve is undermined by contemplation, and enterprises of great importance consequently go awry, never to be realised. The fair Ophelia (sees Ophelia apparently praying and silences himself)! In your prayers may you remember all of my sins.

Ophelia  My lord, how are you after such a long time?

Hamlet  I humbly thank you for your concern. I am well.

Ophelia  My lord, I have keepsakes of yours that I have for a long time wished to return to you. I hope you’ll now accept them.

Hamlet  I am no longer the same man who gave you those things. I gave you nothing.

Ophelia  My honoured lord, you know perfectly well you did, and with such sweet and thoughtful words as to make them even more precious. Their romantic, sentimental value now lost, I’d like you to take them back; for to the noble mind rich gifts loose their worth when the giver changes so profoundly. Here, my lord.

Hamlet  Ha, ha! Are you honest (truthful or genuine; also means ‘chaste’ (though this sense is now dated); Hamlet playing on these two different meanings)?

Ophelia  My lord?

Hamlet  Are you fair (can also mean ‘chaste’; Hamlet once again playing on possible meanings of the word)?

Ophelia  What does your lordship mean?

Hamlet  That if you are honest and fair, your honesty should permit no one any contact with your beauty.

Ophelia  Could beauty, my lord, be more appropriately associated with anything other than honesty?

Hamlet  No, truly it cannot, for the power of beauty can all too easily transform honesty to indecency. This was once contrary to conventional wisdom, but recent events have demonstrated it to be true. I did love you once.
Ophelia  Indeed, my lord, you made me believe so.

Hamlet  You should not have believed me; for virtue is incompatible with, and cannot be integrated into, human nature; we can but taste of it. I loved you not.

Ophelia  Then I was deceived.

Hamlet  Get thee to a nunnery. Would you be a breeder of sinners (have children, thereby bringing people into the world who would because of their very nature commit sin)? I am myself moderately honest, but I could accuse myself of such things that it would be better had my mother not borne me. I am very proud, vengeful, ambitious, with more offences than I could even imagine or would have time to carry out waiting for me to commit them. What should such fellows as I do, standing amidst man’s corruption and depravity, yet aspiring towards more worthy values? We are all thoroughly dishonest; believe none of us. Be on your way to a nunnery. Where’s your father?

Ophelia  At home, my lord.

Hamlet  Let the doors be shut upon him, that he may play the fool nowhere but in his own house. Farewell.

Ophelia  O help him, sweet Heavens.

Hamlet  If you do marry, you’d be well-advised to be as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, even though by doing this you would not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery. Farewell. Or if you are intent upon marrying, marry a fool; for wise men are well aware of your tendencies, that your nature is such that you will sooner or later be tempted into infidelity. To a nunnery go, and quickly too. Farewell.

Ophelia  Heavenly powers, restore him.

Hamlet  I have heard much of your use of cosmetics. You must have some awareness of how such a practice is hated by society. God has given you one face and you make yourselves another. You adopt a fake, affected manner, trying to present yourself as something you are not, in an effort to make yourself more seductive, as though you know no better. Go, I’ll speak no more on this matter. It has made me mad. I say we will have no more marriage. Those that are married already, all but one, shall live; the rest can stay as they are. To a nunnery, go.

Exit Hamlet

Ophelia  O, what a noble mind has been lost! The once so admirable courtier, soldier, scholar, swordsman, heir to the throne of Denmark and rose of this fair state, adored and respected by everyone, now reduced to this! And I, a lady most dejected and wretched, once the subject of his promises and declarations of love, which were like sweet music, see now that they were borne of a disordered mind; this unrivalled, youthful man destroyed by madness. O woe is me to have seen what I have seen, to see what I see.
Enter King and Polonius

King Love? His affections do not that way tend, nor does what he said, which, though it lacked a little in coherence and rationality, did not seem like madness. There’s something with which he is preoccupied hidden beneath the melancholy he projects, and I do fear there will be some danger when his true purpose is disclosed. Measures must be taken to avert such a threat, so I have in quick determination decided he shall be despatched without delay to England where he will endeavour to reinstate an annual tax we once levied there. Hopefully the seas and different countries and sights shall remedy whatever is troubling him, whatever it is that his mind has become so consumed with and causes him to manifest such questionable and abnormal behaviour. What do you think of my proposal?

Polonius It should be very beneficial to him. However, I do still believe the origin of his grief is indeed unreciprocated love. Are you all right, Ophelia? You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said, we heard it all. My lord, do as you please, but I ask that, if you see fit, after the play, you let his mother see him alone in order that she may entreat him to reveal the source of his grief. Let her be stern with him, and I’ll be secretly positioned close by, if it pleases you, where I will hear all of the ensuing exchange. Should it be that she is unable to discover the cause of his troubled state, then send him to England; or indeed to wherever, in your wisdom, you think it most advisable that he go.

King It shall be so. Madness in great ones must not go unwatched.

Scene 2

Enter Hamlet and three of the Players

Hamlet Speak the speech, I pray (used to emphasise a request or command) you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly, in a lively and fluent manner; if you’re going to deliver it as many of your fellow actors do, I would rather the town crier spoke my lines. Neither must you saw the air too much with your hand, like this (demonstrates), but be moderate and gentle in your manner; for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, whirlwind of your passion, you must acquire and display a temperance, a degree of restraint and control, that may give it smoothness. O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious, periwig-wearing player overact and completely spoil a strong emotional piece, tearing it to tatters, to very rags, deafening the spectators stood in front of the stage (the cheapest part of the theatre for members of Elizabethan theatre audiences), and who is clearly, for the most part, capable of nothing but incomprehensible silent plays and noise. I would have such a fellow whipped for overdoing even Termagant (an overbearing deity in medieval plays). This sort of thing is quite unacceptable. It’s more grating than the wrath portrayed on stage when King Herod was represented in medieval plays. Pray you avoid it.

First Player I warrant we will honour your wishes.
Hamlet  Be not too tame neither, but use your discretion in deciding how the piece should be rendered. Suit the action to the words, the words to the action, but pay attention to one particular aspect of your performance: be sure that you do not employ an unnatural or exaggerated manner. Be sure that it is true-to-life and thus convincing. For anything so overdone detracts from the whole purpose of acting, the aim of which, as it has been throughout history, is to hold, as it were, a mirror up to nature, to reflect reality, to represent virtue and scorn as they are in life, and show things just as they were during the time in which the play is set. Now if this is overdone or badly staged, though it will still make the uneducated laugh, it can only leave the learned and more discerning spectators disappointed and dissatisfied. The censure of just one such person must in your estimation outweigh a whole theatre of common and uncultured people. There are actors I have seen act, and heard others praise, that, not to speak of it profanely, had neither the speaking ability nor the physical manner of even an ordinary, respectable person, and who so strutted and bellowed, and performed with such ineptitude, that I thought they hardly seemed like real people at all; it was as though they had been made by some of Nature’s hired labourers, rather than God himself, and not made well, they imitated humanity so abominably.

First Player  I hope we have mostly reformed any such problems there may have been in our company.

Hamlet  O reform yourselves completely. And let those that play the comic parts speak no more than is set down for them, for there are some of them who will themselves laugh and no doubt inspire some of the less well-educated spectators to laugh too. In the meantime this detracts significantly from necessary questions about the play, consideration of its meaning and its characters and plot. That’s utterly unacceptable and shows most pitiful ambition on the part of the actor. Go and make yourselves ready.

Exit Players

Enter Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Well, my lord, will the King watch this piece of work (to Polonius)?

Polonius  And the Queen too, and at once.

Hamlet  Bid the players make haste.

Exit Polonius

Will you two go and urge them to hasten?

Rosencrantz  Yes, my lord.

Exit Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Hamlet  Hello there, Horatio!

Enter Horatio
Horatio  My lord, I am at your service.

Hamlet  Horatio, you are indeed one of the most noble and honest men I have ever known.

Horatio  My dear lord.

Hamlet  No, do not think I flatter you, for what could I hope to gain from you except your good spirits, your loyalty and your friendship, since you have little more than sufficient wealth to provide yourself with food and clothing? What purpose would be served by flattering those who are not particularly affluent? No, let adulation be shown for what it is, a ridiculous and artificial display of respect where people are all too ready to fall on bended knee in fawning whenever the possibility of monetary reward presents itself. Do you hear? Since my dear soul was mistress (personification of the soul as a woman with authority) of her choice and able in her election to distinguish between men, she has chosen you as my closest friend and confidant; for you are one who has endured a great deal yet ultimately remained unharmed, a man who can accept both the buffets and rewards of fortune; who is not easily dispirited by adversity. And blest are those who are rational and judicious, who act with wisdom and objectivity rather than being ruled by their own propensities and allowing their lives to be dictated entirely by fortune. Show me a man who is not a slave to emotion, compelled to obey his own selfish desires, and I will admire and hold dear such a person, as I do you. I’m saying too much on this matter. There is to be a play tonight before the King. One scene of it depicts with reasonable accuracy the circumstances as I explained them to you of my father’s murder. I ask that when you see that act afoot, with the most rigorous scrutiny, observe my uncle. If his occulted guilt does not reveal itself as a result of this piece I have written into the play, then it is an evil spirit, a damned ghost, that we have seen, and my suspicions are quite groundless and unjust. Watch him intently, for my own eyes will be riveted to his face, and afterwards we’ll compare our judgements and resolve whether or not we can legitimately assume he is guilty.

Horatio  Very well, my lord. If anything should escape my attention whilst this play is playing and his crimes avoid my detection, I will answer for it.

Enter trumpets and kettle-drums, which then sound a flourish

Hamlet  They’re coming to the play. I should look as though I’m doing nothing but idly waiting. Go and find a place.

Enter King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Attendants

King  How fares our cousin Hamlet?

Hamlet  Excellent, I trust, of the chameleon’s dish. (he responds as though ‘fares’ was meant in the sense of ‘eats’ or ‘dines’ (this sense being dated)) I eat the air, which is full of promises. You cannot fatten capons in this way.

King  I fail to understand this reply. These words do not answer my question.
Hamlet  No, nor mine now. My lord, you acted at one time in the university, you say (to Polonius)?

Polonius  That I did, my lord, and I was accounted a good actor.

Hamlet  What did you enact?

Polonius  I enacted Julius Caesar. I was killed in the capital. Brutus killed me.

Hamlet  It was brutal of him to kill so capital a fool there. Are the players ready?

Rosencrantz  Yes, my lord, they are waiting on you.

Queen  Come here, my dear Hamlet, sit by me.

Hamlet  No, my good mother, here’s metal more attractive (someone more attractive, in the sense of having greater magnetism).

  Turns to Ophelia

Polonius  Do you see that (aside to the King)?

Hamlet  Lady, shall I lie in your lap (lying down at Ophelia’s feet)?

Ophelia  No, my lord

Hamlet  I mean, my head simply upon you lap.

Ophelia  Yes, my lord.

Hamlet  Do you think I meant something of a sexual nature?

Ophelia  I think nothing, my lord.

Hamlet  That’s a fair thought to lie between a maiden’s legs.

Ophelia  What is, my lord?

Hamlet  Nothing.

Ophelia  You are merry, my lord.

Hamlet  Who, I?

Ophelia  Yes, my lord.

Hamlet  God is by far your best maker of comedies. What should a man do but be merry? For look how cheerful my mother looks, my father dead not two hours.
Ophelia No, it’s several months, my lord.

Hamlet So long? Then let the devil wear black, for I’ll have a suit of sables. O Heavens, died several months ago and not forgotten yet! Then there’s hope a great man’s memory may outlive his life half a year. But by Our Lady, we must build monuments then, or else he shall suffer being forgotten.

*Trumpets sound. A silent show follows* (this condensed and simplified version of the play to follow serves as an aid to the audience in understanding it, though the more intelligent would tend to pay it little attention. Presumably, this is the case with Claudius and explains why he does not react as he does after the main play)

Enter a King and Queen, embracing each other. She kneels and makes a protestation of love unto him. He brings her to her feet and declines his head upon her neck. He lies down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him. A short time later, another man enters the scene, removes the crown from the King’s head, kisses it, pours poison into the sleeping King’s ear and leaves him. The Queen returns and, finding the King dead, is distraught. The poisoner, accompanied by three or four others, returns. They condole the Queen. The dead body is carried away. The poisoner woos the Queen with gifts. She seems to reject his advances before finally accepting his love.

Ophelia What does this mean, my lord?

Hamlet Marry, this is clandestine devilry. It means mischief.

Ophelia This probably demonstrates the plot of the play.

*Enter Prologue*

Hamlet This fellow will explain its meaning. The actors cannot keep secrets; they’ll tell all.

Ophelia Will he tell us what this show meant?

Hamlet Yes, or any show that you might show him. Do not be ashamed to show yourself, he’ll not be ashamed to tell you what it means.

Ophelia You’re being offensive and indecent. I’ll watch the play.

Prologue
*For us and for our tragedy,*
*Here stooping to your clemency,*
*We beg your hearing patiently.*

*Exit Prologue*

Hamlet Is this a prologue or some obscure motto?

Ophelia It was brief, my lord.
Hamlet  As a woman’s love.

   Enter the Player King and Queen

Player King
Full thirty times hath Phoebus’ cart gone round
Neptune’s salt wash and Tellus’ orbed ground,
And thirty dozen moons with borrowed sheen
About the world have times twelve thirteen been
Since love our hearts and Hymen did our hands
Unite commutual in most sacred bands.

Player Queen
So many journeys may the sun and moon
Make us again count over ere love be done.
But woe is me, you are so sick of late,
So far from cheer and from your former state,
That I distrust you. Yet though I distrust,
Discomfort you, my lord, it nothing must;
For women’s fear and love hold quantity,
In neither aught or extremity.
Now what my love is, proof hath made you know,
And as my love is sized, my fear is so.
Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear;
Where little fears grow great, great love grows there.

Player King
Faith, I must leave thee, love, and shortly too;
My operant powers their functions leave to do;
And thou shalt live in this fair world behind,
Honoured, beloved: and haply one as kind
For husband shalt thou...

Player Queen
O confound the rest.
Such love must needs be treason in my breast.
In second husband let me be accurst.
None wed the second but who killed the first.

Hamlet  That’s wormwood (something that will cause bitter feeling) (aside).

Player Queen
The instances that second marriage move
Are base respects of thrift, but none of love.
A second time I kill my husband dead,
When second husband kisses me in bed.

Player King
I do believe you think what now you speak,
But what we do determine, often we break.
Purpose is but the slave to memory,
Of violent birth but poor validity,
Which now, the fruit unripe, sticks on the tree,
But fall unshaken when they mellow be.

Most necessary it is that we forget
To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt.
What to ourselves in passion we propose,
The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.

The violence of either grief or joy
Their own enactures with themselves destroy.
Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament;
Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident.

This world is not for aye, nor ‘tis not strange
That even our loves should with our fortunes change,
For ‘tis a question left us yet to prove,
Whether love lead fortune or else fortune’s love.

The great man down, you mark his favourite flies;
The poor advanced makes friends of enemies;
And hitherto doth love on fortune tend;
For who not needs shall never lack a friend,
And who in want a hollow friend doth try
Directly seasons him his enemy.

But orderly to end where I begun,
Our wills and fates do so contrary run
That our devices still are overthrown:
Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of their own.

So think thou wilt no second husband wed,
But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead.

Player Queen
Not earth to me give food, nor heaven light,
Sport and repose lock from me day and night,
To desperation turn my trust and hope,
An anchor’s cheer in prison be my scope,
Each opposite, that blanks the face of joy,
Meet what I would have well and it destroy,
Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife,
If, once a widow, ever I be a wife.

Player King
‘Tis deeply sworn. Sweet, leave me here awhile.
My spirit grows dull, and fain I would beguile
The tedious day with sleep.

He sleeps

Player Queen
Sleep rock thy brain,
And never come mischance between us twain.
Exit Player Queen

Hamlet  Madam, how do you like this play?

Queen  It seems to me the lady is carrying her protestations of love too far.

Hamlet  O, but she’ll keep her word.

King  Do you know what this play is about? Is there anything offensive in it?

Hamlet  No, no it’s merely a pretence. There is no offence at all.

King  What do you call the play?

Hamlet  ‘The Mousetrap’. Something of a metaphor, actually. This play is the image of a murder done in Vienna. Gonzago is the Duke’s name, his wife Baptista. You shall see anon. He’s a cunning and dishonest character, but what of it? For your Majesty, and we that have clean souls, it stirs no feelings; it simply does not affect us, there’s nothing in it to which we can relate. Let wince those whose hearts tire of being encumbered with guilt, our consciences are unburdened.

Enter Lucianus

This is one Lucianus, nephew to the King.

Ophelia  You are as good as a chorus (group of actors in ancient Greek plays who spoke in unison, commenting on the significance of events), my lord.

Hamlet  I could act as the interpreter for you and your lover, if I could see the puppets dallying (what you were up to, the metaphor being that of a puppet show).

Ophelia  You are keen, my lord, you are keen.

Hamlet  It would cost you considerable physical discomfort to be able to satisfy my sexual desire.

Ophelia  Yet more obscene.

Hamlet  Women take too lightly the vows they make to their husbands in marriage. Begin, murderer (Hamlet is waiting impatiently for the next stage of the play). Proceed with your damnable act. Come, ‘the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge’ (quotes lines, albeit inaccurately, from an old play).

Lucianus

Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing,
Confederate season, else no creature seeing,
Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,
With Hecate’s ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,
Thy natural magic and dire property
On wholesome life usurps immediately.

Pours poison into the sleeping King’s ear

Hamlet  He poisons him in the garden for his estate. His name is Gonzago. The play is still in existence, and written in very choice Italian. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago’s wife.

Ophelia  The King rises.

The Courtiers stand also, in accordance with court etiquette. Confusion ensues

Hamlet  What, frightened with false fire (guns firing blank cartridges)?

Queen  What’s the matter, my lord?

Polonius  Discontinue the play.

King  Give me some light. Away.

Polonius  Lights, lights, lights.

Exit all but Hamlet and Horatio

Hamlet  Would this theatrical piece, sir, even if the rest of my fortunes disappoint, not get me a fellowship in a company of actors, and a forest of feathers in my hat (this was fashionable amongst actors)?

Horatio  It’s enough to get you half a share of the company’s assets.

Hamlet  A whole one, I should think. O Horatio, it is certain the ghost’s words are indeed the unadulterated truth. Did you observe the King?

Horatio  Most closely, my lord.

Hamlet  At the point of the poisoning?

Horatio  I did note well his reaction.

Hamlet  Ah ha! Come, some music; come, the recorders.

Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Guildenstern  Excuse me, my lord; permit me a word with you.

Hamlet  Sir, a whole story, if you wish.

Guildenstern  The King, sir…..

Hamlet  Yes, sir, what of him?
Guildenstern Has retired to his room in an extremely disconcerted state.

Hamlet Suffering from drink?

Guildenstern No, my lord, from anger.

Hamlet It would be more prudent of you to inform the doctor of this, since for me to attempt to alleviate his condition, possibly by exhorting him to confess his sins (and cure him in a spiritual sense), would perhaps plunge him further into anger.

Guildenstern Very good, my lord, but please address me in a serious and rational manner and without suddenly changing the subject or talking of things which are of no relevance.

Hamlet You need not worry, sir. Continue.

Guildenstern The Queen your mother is very anxious and troubled. She has sent me to you.

Hamlet You are welcome.

Guildenstern No, my good lord, such courtesy is not appropriate. If it shall please you to give me a sensible answer, I will, in accordance with my commandment from your mother, convey her message; otherwise your permission to leave and my reporting your response to the Queen will conclude my business.

Hamlet Sir, I cannot.

Rosencrantz What, my lord?

Hamlet Give you a sensible answer. My intellect is diseased. But sir, such an answer as I can give, you shall command, or rather, as you say, my mother. Therefore, enough of this, to the issue at hand. My mother, you say…..

Rosencrantz She says she is astonished by your behaviour.

Hamlet O wonderful son, that can so astonish a mother! But what followed this mother’s amazement; did she not say anything further? Tell me.

Rosencrantz She wishes to speak with you in her private chamber before you go to bed.

Hamlet I shall do as she asks. Have you any further business?

Rosencrantz My lord, you once considered me a very dear friend.

Hamlet And do still, by these hands.
Rosencrantz  My lord, what is the cause of your condition? You’re certainly not doing yourself any favours by repressing your troubles and refusing to confide in and share your problems with your friend.

Hamlet  Sir, my position in this state lacks advancement.

Rosencrantz  How can that be when the King himself supports your eventual succession to the throne?

Hamlet  Yes, sir, but in the meantime, we live behind what is merely a front of virtue and respectability.

Enter the Players with recorders

O, the recorders. Let me see one. I’d like a private word with you (to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern). Why are you trying to manipulate me, as if to entrap me?

Guildenstern  O my lord, if I am too bold or unmannerly in my duty, it is only because of my deep love and respect for you.

Hamlet  I do not really understand that. How can you be so discourteous and yet claim such great love for me? Will you expound this?

Guildenstern  My lord, I cannot.

Hamlet  I implore you.

Guildenstern  Believe me, I cannot.

Hamlet  I do beseech you.

Guildenstern  I do not know how, my lord.

Hamlet  It is as easy as lying. Simply express yourself truthfully and in a clear, coherent fashion.

Guildenstern  I’m not able to do as you ask.

Hamlet  But you would try to manoeuvre me into disclosing sensitive information. You would appear to know how to manipulate me; you would seek to expose me, to have me betray my true motives and intentions, to reveal my aims in their entirety; and there is much to be known; yet, despite your tactics and your efforts you cannot figure me out; you have failed to elicit the information you want. God’s blood, do you think I am so easily controlled? Try whatever you will. Though you will succeed in irritating me, you cannot outwit me.

Enter Polonius

God bless you, sir.
Polonius  My lord, the Queen would speak with you right away.

Hamlet  Do you see that cloud over there that’s almost in the shape of a camel?

Polonius  By the Mass, it is like a camel, indeed.

Hamlet  Well I think it is like a weasel.

Polonius  The back of it is like a weasel.

Hamlet  Or like a whale.

Polonius  Very like a whale.

Hamlet  Then I will go to my mother in a while. They’re doing their best to try and trick me into showing my true state of mind (aside). I will go in a while.

Polonius  I’ll tell the Queen.

Exit Polonius

Hamlet  It’s easy to say you’ll do something ‘in a while’. Leave me, friends.

Exit all but Hamlet

It is now the very witching hour of night, when churchyards open up their graves and Hell itself breathes out contagion onto this world. Could I observe religious customs and still carry out deeds so unsavoury, so abominable, as to utterly horrify anyone who possesses any sense of morality? Now to my mother. I must maintain a reasoned attitude; I cannot discard my natural feelings or seek to cause her any real harm. Let me be cruel, but not so harsh or unsparing as to deny our natural bond. I will speak daggers to her, but use none. My tongue shall misrepresent my heart in this. However in my words I may attack and condemn her, my true purpose must never become such that they are translated into actions; my actions must remain tempered.

Scene 3

Enter King, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

King  I do not like the way Hamlet has been acting. His recent behaviour causes me great disquiet. It poses a threat to allow him to do as he pleases while in such a troubled state of mind. You are both, therefore, to prepare yourselves. I’m issuing a decree forthwith that he is to be dispatched to England, accompanied by the two of you. My position as king is threatened; I could face ruin if he remains so near to me. The danger he presents grows by the hour.

Guildenstern  We will make ourselves ready. Your concerns are most warranted. It is a great source of worry being obligated to protect and preserve the safety of the many
subjects who rely upon your Majesty to be a competent and fair king. It is a most assuredly prudent measure to keep at a distance any potential menace.

Rosencrantz An individual is equipped with all the strength of mind and fortitude needed to be able to endure and tolerate adversity; but this is much more so in the case of someone upon whose well-being the lives of many depend and rest. The cessation of a monarch’s reign is never an isolated occurrence, but like a maelstrom drawing in everything around it, it affects, and has repercussions for, those who are near to them. It can be likened also to the wheel of fortune, at the highest point of which is your position in society, to which are connected and fastened the places of many lesser individuals: your courtiers, statesmen, family members and so forth, when the wheel turns and the point at which fate has placed you falls from its summit causing everything linked to fall along with it. Even those of comparatively minor importance would be affected by the downfall of the King, were he to become the focus of some scandal or outrage. Never alone does the sovereign fall, not without having a considerable impact on a great many others, engendering consequences which ripple throughout the kingdom.

King Prepare yourselves quickly for this voyage. We must take measures, with some haste, to ensure that the source of our fears, which presently goes unchecked, is shackled and restrained, so to speak.

Rosencrantz We will make haste.

Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Enter Polonius

Polonius My lord, he’s going to his mother’s private chamber. I’ll position myself secretly behind the arras so I can hear everything that goes on between them. I guarantee she’ll take him to task and reprove him over his recent behaviour. And as you said, most wisely, it would be appropriate to have someone there other than his mother, since they are as closely related as it is possible to be and therefore inclined to be very open and straightforward with each other, and so it will be to our great advantage to hear what he will say under such circumstances, what he will reveal of himself. Farewell, my liege. I’ll call upon you before you retire to bed, and tell you what I know.

King Thank you, my lord.

Exit Polonius

O, my offence is utterly vile and despicable, thoroughly evil. The world’s first murder was that of a brother so I’m damned even more because of the biblical significance of such a sinful act. I am unable to pray, to beg forgiveness for my mortal sin. Though my inclination is potent, my crime is unpardonable, my guilt too strong for prayer to be of value. And like a man with two tasks to perform, undecided as to which to address first, who in his hesitance neglects both, I stand in pause. If this cursed hand is thick with my brother’s blood, is there not rain enough in the Heavens to wash it white as snow (biblical allusion: Isaiah: 1: 18: Crimson-dyed be your guilt, it shall
Is there nothing in Heaven that can grant me absolution from my sin? What purpose does mercy really serve except to make us more aware of our wrongdoing? And what is prayer but a request, a plea, that we be forestalled whenever we are about to sin and that we be pardoned should we succumb to temptation? Then I’ll pray to Heaven. I have already sinned; all I can do is repent in the hope of being granted forgiveness, but what form of prayer can serve me now? ‘Forgive me my foul murder?’ That cannot suffice, since I still possess the rewards for which I committed the murder: my crown, my queen; my ambition remains fulfilled, I still profit from my crime. Can a sinner be pardoned and yet retain the assets and benefits which are the result of their crimes? In the corrupt affairs of this world, bribery is a means of averting justice. A gilded hand may buy one’s escape from punishment, and often it is the case that the proceeds of the crime itself are what buy the law. But this is not so in matters of the soul. Here, there is no footing for corruption or fraudulence, everything is laid bare, its true nature exposed, and, confronted with our sins, we can but acknowledge our faults in their entirety as if compelled to testify unreservedly to our own wrongdoing. And what then? To what extent can repentance actually mitigate or absolve us from our sin? Whatever the answer, it can do nothing when one cannot repent. O what a wretched state I am in, my soul as black as death! My soul is trapped; I am condemned by my sin and in trying to seek forgiveness, to find some way of lessening the weight of my guilt, I’m forced to recognise all the more how damned I really am. Help me, angels! I must kneel in contrition. May my hardened heart be filled with penitence. All may then be made well.

_He kneels_

_Enter Hamlet_

_Hamlet_ Now I might do it; now he’s praying. Now I’ll do it.

_Draws his sword_

And so he goes to Heaven, and my father’s murder is not avenged. That would be interpreted thus: a villain kills my father, and for that I, his sole son, do this same villain send to Heaven. Why, this is payment, not revenge. He took my father’s life when he was unprepared for death, afforded no opportunity to confess his sins. Who knows how he will be judged by Heaven now? But in terms of our human ways of thinking on these matters, his situation is extremely unfavourable. This is not revenge, taking him in the purging of his soul, when he has reconciled himself with God and is absolved of his sins. No. I must await a more suitable opportunity: when he is in a drunken stupor, or in his rage, or indulging in the incestuous pleasures of his marital bed; when he is gambling or engaged in some act that has no trace, no vestige, of honour or decency in it, something which will bring him anything but salvation. Then, I will exact my father’s revenge, that he may stumble before Heaven, his soul damned and black as Hell, to where it will then go. My mother is waiting for me. This praying merely prolongs your sickly days.

_Exit Hamlet_
King Though I speak as in prayer, my true appetites remain carnal. Mere words, without sincerity, carry no weight in Heaven; have no substance or worth in a spiritual sense.

Scene 4

(the Queen’s private chamber)

Enter Queen and Polonius

Polonius He’s coming right now. Make sure you are blunt with him. Tell him his pranks and his ill-mannered behaviour have been far too coarse and offensive, with no regard for propriety, and that your Grace has protected him from much anger and reproach. I’ll hide myself in here where I’ll remain, in silence. Pray you, be firm with him.

Queen I assure you I will. Withdraw, I hear him coming.

Polonius hides behind the arras

Enter Hamlet

Hamlet Now, mother, what’s the matter?

Queen Hamlet, you have caused your father much offence.

Hamlet Mother, it is you who has caused my father much offence.

Queen Come, come, you answer with an idle tongue.

Hamlet Go, go, you question with a wicked tongue.

Queen Why, what do you mean, Hamlet?

Hamlet What’s the matter, you don’t know?

Queen Have you forgotten who I am?

Hamlet No, certainly I have not. You are the Queen, your husband’s brother’s wife, and, if only it were not so, you are my mother.

Queen Then I’ll summon those to whom you can speak openly.

Hamlet Sit down, you shall not budge. You will not leave until I have made you recognise the truth of what you have done.

Queen What are you going to do? You will not murder me? Help!

Polonius What’s going on (behind the arras)? Help!
**Hamlet** What’s this? A rat!

*Hamlet thrusts his rapier through the arras*

I’ll bet a ducat I’ve killed it.

**Polonius** I’m dying.

**Queen** O, what have you done?

**Hamlet** I don’t know. Is it the King?

*Hamlet lifts up the arras and discovers Polonius, dead*

**Queen** O what a rash and bloody deed this is!

**Hamlet** Almost as bad, good mother, as killing a king, and marrying his brother.

**Queen** As killing a king?

**Hamlet** Yes, that’s what I said. *(talking to Polonius’s body)* You wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell. I assumed you were the King. Accept your fate; you were interfering in a volatile situation. It’s unfortunate you had to meet with such a painful death. *(addressing the Queen)* Please, sit down, and let me reach into your innermost thoughts and stir your darkest emotions, if you do indeed possess any feelings at all; if your way of life has not rendered you so callous and without conscience that your heart is impenetrable and hardened against emotion.

**Queen** What have I done that you dare speak to me so disapprovingly, in such a harsh and disrespectful manner?

**Hamlet** An act so awful that it blurs the distinction between dignity and shame, exposes your apparent virtue for the hypocrisy that it is, entirely devalues the moral, honourable love you once had with my father, makes your marriage vows as false and empty as a gambler’s promise, and makes you no better than a whore. O, such a deed that it erases the very substance of the commitment you pledged in marriage to my father, making your vows, though you expressed them enthusiastically enough, in consequence, nothing more than meaningless, valueless words. The heavens grow gloomy and overcast, as though doomsday were imminent; the whole spirit and atmosphere of the world affected by the thought of what has been done.

**Queen** What are you saying about me, what has been done that is so abhorrent it warrants such a disparaging tirade and has had such profound and adverse consequences?

**Hamlet** Look here upon this picture *(indicates a portrait of his father and his uncle)*, the portrait of two brothers. See what admirable and venerable, even god-like, qualities this man possessed *(indicates his father)*; a look and a personality which could intimidate, and inspire obedience and loyalty; imposing and stately in
appearance, almost like a form which combined the attributes of every god to give the world the perfect example of a man. This was your husband. Look at what has now come about. Here is your present husband (draws attention to his uncle in the portrait) who, like an infected ear of corn spreading disease through the rest of the crop, has defiled the whole kingdom by destroying his own brother and assuming his place. Do you not see what’s happened? How could you disregard the love you professed to feel for this impeccable man, so easily switching your devotion to this wretch? Do you not realise what he is? You cannot call it love; for at your age the desire for sexual passion has greatly subsided and is all but diminished, subject now to your own discretion, no longer at the mercy of youthful lust. So what judgement, what motivation, made you go from this to this? Obviously you possess the capacities afforded us by our senses, otherwise you would be unable to function as you do; but surely your senses are impaired, for even if you were mad you would not make such an error of judgement; rationality and reason were never so enslaved to madness but reserved in sufficient quantity to enable one to perceive so marked a difference as that which existed between my father and my uncle. What devil has deceived you and prevented you from seeing the truth? You see and hear without actually being aware of the reality of what’s going on; you’ve become intimately involved with someone without having any insight into their true nature, although you must have realised something about the kind of man my uncle is. Regardless of what he is, the very fact that you married in this way is enough. Where is your sense of shame and dishonour? If sexual ardour, too potent to be restrained by reason and volition, deserts the matron, then when virtue melts and burns in the flame of youth, when it is entirely undermined by the vigour and potency of the young, there can be no shame; no shame when compulsive lust surges, producing overpowering passionate urges, since even the subdued, waning sexual appetites of the mature woman can sometimes burn just as intensely, it seems, forcing logic and rationality to once again indulge the will of passion.

Queen O Hamlet, speak no more. You’re looking into my very soul, talking about my most intimate affairs. I know I’ve committed unforgivable deeds and acts of impiety. There are sins of such gravity they can never be excused.

Hamlet No, but to have entered willingly into an immoral and incestuous relationship and to engage in such disgraceful, disgusting acts as to lie in your marital bed, being affectionate and making love to my uncle in this pit of iniquity and depravity…..

Queen O speak to me no more. These words are like daggers to my ears, deeply hurtful and upsetting. No more, sweet Hamlet.

Hamlet A murderer and a villain, someone worth no more than a mere slave; not a fraction of what your previous husband was; a travesty, a parody, of a king; a thief of the empire and of its sovereignty who stole its precious diadem to satisfy his own rapacity and hedonistic, self-serving propensities.

Queen No more.

Hamlet A king of shreds and patches, of no substance and no moral core.
Enter Ghost

Save me, Heavenly angels! What does your gracious figure want? (the ghost is observable only to Hamlet)

Queen  Alas, he’s mad.

Hamlet  Do you come to reproach your son for his inaction? I have neglected potential opportunities to effect your revenge, allowing to lapse my impetus, my commitment and enthusiasm, to do your bidding, and thus failed to fulfil the duty with which you have charged me. Tell me.

Ghost  Do not forget what I have said (about not harming his mother). This visitation is but to whet thy almost blunted purpose. Look at the amazement on your mother’s face. Ease her troubled and confounded soul; enlighten her. Conceit is strongest in those of the weakest mind and character. Speak to her, Hamlet.

Hamlet  Are you all right (speaking to the Queen)?

Queen  Alas, what’s wrong with you that you stand there gazing into empty space, holding a conversation with nothing but empty air; as though there were someone there? There’s a wild and feverish look in your eyes; you appear not unlike a sleeping soldier called suddenly into action; your hair is tousled and stands on end as if you’ve just risen from your bed. O Hamlet, you’re in a deeply troubled and discomposed state of mind, you must calm yourself. What is it you’re looking at?

Hamlet  At him, at him. Look how his pale visage glares. He has appeared here in this manifestation for a reason; I have consistently failed to commit myself to action; preaching to stones would have elicited a greater response. (addressing the ghost) Do not look upon me in such a pitiful way for fear that your low expectations of me and lack of faith in my abilities may dampen my already inadequate resolve. Then what I have to do will further lack immediacy and may not be carried out in the most desirable manner or under favourable circumstances. Tears may be shed rather than blood.

Queen  To whom do you speak this?

Hamlet  Do you see nothing there?

Queen  Nothing at all, except for what is actually there.

Hamlet  Did you not hear anything?

Queen  No, nothing but ourselves.

Hamlet  Why, look there, look how it steals away. My father, dressed just as he was when he lived! Look as he goes even now out through the doorway.

Exit Ghost
Queen  This is fantasy, it’s all in your imagination. This madness has made your mind very potent and capable in creating illusion.

Hamlet  My pulse is as steady as yours and sounds just as healthy. None of what I have said or done is the product of madness. Put me to the test, have me explain or recount something which insanity would not allow me to. Mother, for the love of God, do not delude yourself that you haven’t really committed any serious fault, that what I have said can simply be ascribed to madness. That will only serve to repress the truth, you’ll only be deceiving yourself while the consequences of your transgression and the sense of guilt inside you will grow and worsen, troubling your conscience more and more, devouring your spirit. Confess yourself to Heaven, repent over what you have done and strive to abstain from sin in future. Do not compound your trespasses, but endeavour to avoid occasions where you may be further tempted into sin. May the fact that I am upright and principled be enough to excuse what I have done here, for in these morally wanting times, doing the right thing sometimes demands that we perpetrate acts of cruelty or malice.

Queen  O Hamlet, you have cleft my heart in two.

Hamlet  Well throw away the worse part of it and live all the purer with the other half. Good night. But go not to my uncle’s bed. Acquire some virtue if you have none. The normal, commonplace practices in which humanity engages are frequently so morally corrupt and iniquitous that we can all too easily lose any sense of the evil and immorality our actions so readily embody. Yet I suppose this does have one advantage in that it has the potential to prompt and inspire us to better ourselves and act with a sense of goodness and decency, giving us something we can refuse to be a part of. Refrain tonight and that shall lend some easiness to the next abstinence, the next easier again; for adopting and conforming to particular practices, and making yourself exercise a different moral code can influence and perhaps alter your very nature, either embracing the devil or throwing him out with considerable potency. Once more, good night, and when you want God’s blessing I will pray that you receive it. For the death of this lord (referring to Polonius) I do repent; but it was the will of Heaven, to punish both of us, making me the agent of Divine will. I will hide his body and will answer for his death. So, again, good night. I must be cruel only to be kind. His having been murdered in this way is bad enough, yet the worst is still to come. There’s one more thing I wish to say to you.

Queen  What shall I do?

Hamlet  Whatever you do, by no means are you to allow that overindulgent disgrace of a king to tempt you again to his bed and be affectionate and amorous towards you, calling you his endearing names, stroking and caressing your neck with his damned fingers, trying to entice you, for a few of his filthy kisses, into unravelling this whole matter for him, allowing him to understand that I am actually not mad at all but only feigning madness. A queen who’s fair, sober and wise would see fit to hide this knowledge from such a wicked, avaricious, self-serving villain. Despite the fact that in keeping this from the King you will be infringing your duty and obligation to him, you must neither make known the truth nor attempt to imitate the chicanery and cunning of my own subterfuge.
Queen  Rest assured, I will not breathe a word of what you have said to me.

Hamlet  I must go to England, you know that?

Queen  Alas, I had forgotten. It has been so decided.

Hamlet  There are sealed letters from the King which are to be sent with me, and I am to be accompanied by my two schoolfellows, whom I trust no more than I would a venomous snake; it is they who bear the mandate. They have been charged with the task of escorting me and will no doubt be endeavouring to lead me into some manner of deadly trap. Let them try, for it is only fair that the conspirator face the prospect of being defeated by his own treachery. It shall be unfortunate for them but I will implement a stratagem of my own which will completely thwart their purpose and turn the tables on them. It becomes most interesting when two schemes go head to head like this. The fate which has befallen this man (referring to Polonius) shall be the starting point for my own plot. I’ll have to drag him into the adjoining room. Mother, good night indeed. This councillor is now quite dead. He was in life a foolish, prating knave. Come, sir, let’s draw to an end this business with you. Good night, mother.

Exit Hamlet dragging Polonius’ body
Act 4

Scene 1

Enter King, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to where the Queen has remained

King The deranged and unbalanced state Hamlet manifests disguises a hidden purpose. He has some covert agenda. You must explain what it is. We need to understand it. Where is he?

Queen Leave us for a while.

Exit Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

Yes, my son, whom I have seen tonight.

King What have you managed to find out?

Queen He is completely crazed, utterly unbalanced; hopelessly and incurably mad. Upon hearing someone behind the arras, in his wild and uncontrollable insanity, he whipped out his rapier, cried: “What’s this? A rat!” and in his mindless derangement killed the old man who was hiding there.

King This is regrettable indeed. He would probably have tried to kill me, had I been there. His liberty constitutes a grave threat to us all: to yourself, to me, to everyone. This places me in a position of yet greater difficulty: what explanation am I to release when it is announced that Polonius is dead? Blame will be laid upon us; we should have had the foresight to ensure this mad young man was kept under far stricter control, restrained from going wherever and doing whatever he pleased. But such was
our love and respect for him we held back from taking the appropriate action. Instead, to protect him, to prevent his madness from becoming public knowledge, we unwise
afforded him too much freedom and allowed the situation to become worse. Where
has he gone?

**Queen** He was taking away Polonius’ body. He weeps for what he has done, his
madness thereby showing itself to be genuine.

**King** Even before the sun has risen over the mountains, he’ll have been sent away
from here. We’ll have to excuse him for this vile murder and accept that it was our
own negligence that allowed it to occur. Ah, Guildenstern.

*Enter Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*

Friends, both of you, go and enlist someone to help you. Hamlet in his madness has
slain Polonius. He dragged the body from his mother’s chamber and its present
whereabouts are unknown to us. You are to go and seek him out, but be diplomatic
and tactful with him. Ascertain the location of the body and have it transferred to the
chapel. I pray you make haste in this.

*Exit Rosencrantz and Guildenstern*

Come, Gertrude, we’ll consult with our wisest advisors and let them know of what we
mean to do and of the untimely death of Polonius. While he’s in England, what is
there to preclude his spreading malicious rumours about me? Slander holds the
potential to insidiously poison and eventually destroy an individual’s reputation; to
ultimately bring about their downfall. Then again, any slander may go unheeded. It
may be that nobody would pay it much attention or take it seriously and it would be of
no consequence. O, let’s leave; this has all left me quite perturbed and dismayed.

**Scene 2**

*(somewhere inside the castle)*

*Enter Hamlet*

**Hamlet** Well that’s safely hidden away.

*Hears someone calling him*

What’s that? Who calls on me? O, here they come.

*Enter Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Others*

**Rosencrantz** What have you done, my lord, with the dead body?

**Hamlet** Combined it with dust, to which it is kin *(biblical allusion: Genesis: 3: 19:
dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return).*
Rosencrantz Tell us where it is so that we may take it from there and bear it to the chapel.

Hamlet Do not believe it.

Rosencrantz Believe what?

Hamlet That I can keep your intentions secret and not my own. Besides, to be questioned by a sponge, what reply should be made by the son of a king?

Rosencrantz Do you think I’m a sponge, my lord?

Hamlet Ay, sir, that soaks up the King’s favour and praise, his rewards, his sovereign powers; taking advantage of what he can do for you. But ultimately it’s the King who profits the most. He merely uses agents like you to serve his own ends. When he needs the information you, as his spies, have gleaned, he’s squeezing you and, like a sponge, you shall be dry again.

Rosencrantz I understand you not, my lord.

Hamlet I am glad of it. Fools do not appreciate sarcasm.

Rosencrantz My lord, you must tell us where the body is and go with us to the King.

Hamlet The body is with the King (in the grounds of the palace), but the King is not with the body (in the sense that he is not dead, or perhaps that he is simply not in proximity to it). The King is a thing…..

Guildenstern A thing, my lord?

Hamlet Of no worth. Bring me to him.

Scene 3

Enter King and two or three Lords

King I have sent someone to go and seek Hamlet and to find the body. How dangerous it is that this man is permitted his freedom! Yet we must not enforce severe measures against him; we need to tread carefully; he’s loved by the ignorant and unwitting masses. They recognize only a person’s public image and are not in a position to exercise any real judgement; they’re not close enough to really understand the individual, and under such circumstances it’s the person’s punishment which people focus on and criticise, never the offence itself. To avoid stirring up disapproval or provoking awkward questions, Hamlet’s being sent away so suddenly must be seen as a decision which we have carefully weighed and deliberated, and determined to be in everyone’s best interests. Diseases which have grown acute demand that desperate measures be taken to remedy them.

Enter Rosencrantz and Others
So, what have you to tell me?

Rosencrantz  Where the dead body is bestowed, my lord, we cannot get from him.

King  But where is he?

Rosencrantz  Outside, my lord, under guard, awaiting your command.

King  Bring him before us.

Rosencrantz  Bring in Lord Hamlet.

Enter Hamlet with Guards

King  Now, Hamlet, where’s Polonius?

Hamlet  At supper.

King  At supper? Where?

Hamlet  Not where he eats, but where he is eaten. A certain convocation of political worms are eating away at him. Even an emperor is, ultimately, only food for worms. We fatten other creatures to fatten ourselves, and we fatten ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar are but different courses: two dishes, but to one meal. That’s the end.

King  Alas, alas.

Hamlet  A man may fish with the worm that has eaten of a king, and eat of the fish that has fed of that worm.

King  What do you mean by this?

Hamlet  Nothing but to illustrate to you how a king may go on a royal tour through the guts of a beggar.

King  Where is Polonius?

Hamlet  In Heaven. Send someone there to see. If your messenger finds he is not there, seek him in the other place (Hell) yourself (Hamlet is telling the King, with cautious phrasing, to go to Hell). But if indeed you find him not within this month, you shall smell him as you go up the stairs into the lobby.

King  Go and seek him there (to some Attendants).

Hamlet  He will stay until you come.

Exit Attendants
King  Hamlet, for your own safety, for which we are concerned, as we deeply regret what you have done, we must send you away with immediacy. So prepare yourself. The ship is ready, the wind blowing favourably. Your two companions are waiting and everything is set for your journey to England.

Hamlet  To England?

King  Yes, Hamlet.

Hamlet  Good.

King  So it is, if you knew my reason for sending you there.

Hamlet  I see an angel that knows. But come, to England. Farewell, dear mother.

King  What about thy loving father, Hamlet?

Hamlet  No, just my mother. Father and mother are man and wife, man and wife are one flesh; so there is only my mother. Come, to England.

Exit Hamlet

King  Stay close to him. Prompt him to hurry, there must be no delay; he is to leave tonight. All of the pertinent aspects of this matter have been taken care of. Pray you make haste.

Exit all but the King

England (Claudius is speaking as if to address the King of England), the greatness of our power should have taught you to respect us. Even now you’re feeling the effects of our military might and if you value my favour at all, you are to comply with this royal behest I have dispatched to you, the documents of which contain full instructions with the effect of ordering the immediate execution of Hamlet. This must be done, for like a fever raging in my blood, he is a source of inordinate worry and constitutes a serious threat to me. I cannot rest until I know he is dead.

Scene 4

(en route to the waiting ship)

Enter Fortinbras with his Army, marching through Denmark

Fortinbras  Captain, go and convey my greetings to the Danish King. Tell him that in regard to his entreaty (forwarded to the King by Voltemand in Act Two) Fortinbras earnestly requests that he be granted safe passage for his forces through his kingdom. You know the rendezvous. If his Majesty sees fit to respond in our favour, we shall be obliged to go and express our gratitude to him in person.

Captain  I will do so, my lord.
Fortinbras March on, but be aware that we are to cause as little disturbance as possible while we are here in Denmark.

Exit all but the Captain

Enter Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Others

Hamlet Good sir, whose forces are these?

Captain They are from Norway, sir.

Hamlet What is their purpose, sir, I pray you?

Captain To invade some part of Poland.

Hamlet Who commands them, sir?

Captain The nephew of the King of Norway, Fortinbras.

Hamlet Is it an invasion of the Polish mainland, sir, or some peripheral region?

Captain In all honesty, it would be easy to overstate our objectives as we’re only going to gain a small area of land that really has no profit in it; the prince is committing his forces to this undertaking merely in the interests of his own reputation and stature. As for the piece of land in question, I wouldn’t pay five ducats to lease it, nor would it be worth more than that were the King of Norway, or indeed the King of Poland, to sell it.

Hamlet Why, then the Polish King will never defend it.

Captain Actually he has already stationed a garrison of soldiers there.

Hamlet There can be no justification for incurring the loss of hundreds of lives and the expenditure of thousands of ducats over such an insignificant and inconsequential area of land. This is the disease of too much wealth and power, which leads naturally to corruption, the tendency to exploit that power too great for man’s nature to resist, campaigns to conquer other lands a typical consequence, without there being any just cause for engaging in conflict. I humbly thank you sir.

Captain Goodbye, sir.

Exit Captain

Rosencrantz Is it pleases you, my lord, we must be on our way.

Hamlet I’ll be with you in a moment. Go on ahead.

Exit all but Hamlet
How events seem to conspire against me. They spur my dulled resolve, forcing me to realise I am in danger of loosing every opportunity to accomplish my task. What use is a man if his chief purpose is but to sleep and eat? He would be no more than a beast. There is no doubt that our maker, who created us with such a substantial capacity to think and reason, to learn from and improve upon our past, did not give us such capabilities, such powers of intellect, simply for them to remain dormant and unused. Now whether I’ve been too easily distracted by other matters, or it was just cowardly hesitation caused by thinking and moralizing too much, contemplating the issue to an inordinate degree - and there was some wisdom in this - I do not know why I have as yet failed to exact my father’s revenge, since I have the motive and the justification; I possess the will, the strength and the means to do it. Before me are events of such significance they inflame my determination and exhort me to fulfil my charge: I’m witnessing this huge, extremely expensive army, led by a sensitive young prince whose spirit and ambition scoffs at danger and any prospect of defeat, who is exposing his soldiers, mere mortal men, to all that fate and death dare inflict upon them, all for a piece of land which is hardly worth conquering. True greatness is to fight not only for some major cause, but also when the objective is not so important, when it is more a matter of honour than material gain. Where does that leave me then, my father murdered, my mother sullied, and despite all the incitement I need to fulfil my purpose, having shunned opportunities to act decisively, while now, to my shame, I see the imminent deaths of thousands of men, deceived by the notion that there is renown and honour to be found in war, who go to their graves in numbers the cause cannot justify, fighting for a plot of land not big enough to bury all those who will be slain? From this time forth my thoughts must be entirely focused on fulfilling my duty to my father.

Scene 5

(somewhere inside the castle)

Enter Queen, Horatio and a Gentleman

Queen I will not speak with her.

Gentleman She is making persistent requests and is indeed distraught. She deserves our pity.

Queen What is it she wants?

Gentleman She speaks much of her father, says she hears there are strange things going on, and exhibits a depressed and distracted state of mind, becoming highly irritated at even the most trivial of matters. She speaks of things in a rather vague and ambiguous style that makes only partial sense, things that would seem to hold little, if any, real meaning. People, nevertheless, are inclined to try and make sense of what she’s saying, though their efforts serve only to further confuse and entangle her words as they seek to impose their own ideas and interpretations. They suspect there is something to be uncovered, possibly some cause for disquiet, though nothing is certain.
Horatio  It would be advisable to speak with her, she could prompt dangerous
rumours; there are those who will cause trouble if they think there may be something
going on.

Queen  Let her come in.

Exit Gentleman

(aside) To my heavily stained soul, each toy seems a prologue to some great
adversity. Guilt promotes such suspicion I am in constant fear of my offences being
exposed.

Enter Ophelia.

Ophelia  Where is the Queen of Denmark?

Queen  How are you, Ophelia?

Ophelia  (sings)
How should I your true love know
From another one?
By his cockle hat and staff
And his sandal shoes (the typical attire of a pilgrim).

Queen  Alas, Ophelia, what is the occasion for this song?

Ophelia  What are you saying? No, pray you listen. (sings)
He is dead and gone, lady,
He is dead and gone,
At his head a grass-green turf,
At his heels a stone.

O, ho!

Queen  But Ophelia…..

Ophelia  Pray you listen. (sings)
White his shroud as the mountain snow;

Enter King

Queen  Alas, look here, my lord.

Ophelia  (sings)
Larded with sweet flowers
Which bewept to the grave did not go
With true love showers.

King  How do you do, pretty lady?
Ophelia  Well, may Heaven reward you. They say the owl was a baker’s daughter (reference to a folk story). Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be (biblical allusion: 1 John (the first epistle of John): 3: 2: Beloved, we are sons of God even now, and what we shall be hereafter, has not been made known as yet). God be with you.

King  She’s distressed over her father’s death.

Ophelia  Pray let’s have no word of this, but when they ask you what it means, say you this. (sings) 
_Tomorrow is Saint Valentine’s day,
All in the morning betime,
And I a maid at your window,
To be your Valentine.
Then up he rose and donned his clothes,
And opened the chamber door,
Let in the maid that out a maid
Never departed more._

King  Pretty Ophelia…..

Ophelia  Indeed, without an oath, I’ll make an end on it. (sings) 
_By Jesus and by Saint Charity,
Alack and fie for shame,
Young men will do it if they come to it-
By God, they are to blame._
_Quoth she, ‘before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed.’_
_He answers: ‘so would I have done, by yonder sun,
And thou had not come to my bed.’_

King  How long has she been like this?

Ophelia  I hope all will be well. We must be patient. Yet I cannot help but weep to think they would lay him in the cold ground. My brother shall know of it. And so I thank you for your good counsel. Come, my coach (calls to her coachman). Good night, ladies, good night. Sweet ladies, good night, good night.

Exit Ophelia

King  Follow her; watch her closely, I pray you (to Horatio).

Exit Horatio

O, this is the poison of deep grief, the destructive effect it has upon a person. It all springs from her father’s death. Look what it has done to her. O Gertrude, Gertrude; when sorrows come, they come not alone, but in battalions, as if to overwhelm us. First her father slain, then your son gone; though by virtue of his troublesome and offensive, even dangerous, behaviour, the author of his own just removal; the people left not knowing what to believe. Inevitably, all of this has given rise to rumours and
ideas of a suspicious nature that could be damaging to me. Regarding Polonius’ death, it was unwise for us to inter him so secretly, covering up the affair as we did. Poor Ophelia driven to distraction and deprived of a sense of reason, without which we are mere beasts. On top of all this, and just as importantly, her brother is returning in secret from France. No doubt stunned and bewildered, what has happened to his father has become a consuming preoccupation with him, his demeanour detached and distant. He doesn’t want people promoting scandalous and discreditable reports concerning his father’s death, in respect to which, since few of the facts have been made known, there’s nothing to prevent him arraigning me and telling person after person that I am responsible. O my dear Gertrude, this is a terrible state of affairs. There may be disastrous repercussions for us all.

A noise is heard outside the room

Attend! Where are my guards? Have them guard the door.

Enter a Messenger

What’s going on?

Messenger  Save yourself, my lord. The surging ocean, flooding land at high tide, does not move with greater force and intensity than the impetuous approach of the hot-blooded young Laertes presently heading this way. He’s in a riotous and uncontrollable state, having overpowered your guards. A band of armed rebels accompanies him, a mob whose loyalty and obedience he commands. Almost as if the dawn of a new age were upon us, our old ways forgotten, our customs and traditions, upon which our law and civilisation depends, discarded, they cry: ‘we claim our right to choose! Laertes shall be king’. There are scenes of caps being tossed high into the air to rapturous applause and cheering. They want him elected king.

Queen  How devotedly they follow such a hopeless cause. Their disloyal and subversive action is totally misguided. You false Danish dogs.

A noise is heard outside the room

King  They’ve broken through the doors.

Enter Laertes with Followers

Laertes  Where is the King? Sirs, all of you remain outside the room.

Followers  No, let us come in.

Laertes  I pray you let me confront the King alone.

Followers  We will.

Laertes  I thank you. Watch the door.

Exit Followers
O thou vile King, give me my father.

**Queen** Calm yourself, Laertes (holding him).

**Laertes** With any less fire in my veins I would be unworthy of my father. My mother is left without her husband, free to be unfaithful to him, besmirched in spite of the fact that it is not within her nature to dishonour my father.

**King** For what reason, Laertes, is your defiance towards me, your insurrection, so impassioned and aggressive? Let him go, Gertrude. Do not fear for me. A king enjoys the privilege of Divine protection, so much so that treason is inherently predestined to fail. Little of what is intended by such a cause will be realised. Tell me, Laertes, why are you so incensed? Let him go, Gertrude. Speak, man.

**Laertes** Where is my father?

**King** Dead.

**Queen** But not by him.

**King** Let him explain what he wants of us.

**Laertes** How did he die? I will not be deceived. To Hell with allegiance! Pledges of loyalty to my King can go to the blackest devil! Conscience and grace to the deepest pit! I dare damnation. I’ve come this far, I am no longer concerned by what may happen to me in either this world or the next; let come what comes, only I’ll revenge my father’s death most thoroughly.

**King** Who would stop you?

**Laertes** My will shall prevail above all else. As for the resources at my disposal, I’ll manage them so well that much will be achieved in spite of their limits.

**King** Laertes, if you desire to know the truth about your dear father, tell me, will your hunger for revenge permit you to take on anyone, no matter who they are, even if that should mean challenging someone you regard as a close friend?

**Laertes** I’ll go after whoever is to blame for my father’s death.

**King** Do you want to know their identity then?

**Laertes** To my father’s friends I’ll open my arms and embrace them with fervent warm-heartedness.

**King** Why, you speak like an admirable son and a true gentleman. That I am guiltless of your father’s death and feel the most profound grief over it shall be as clear to your judgement as daylight to your eyes.

Ophelia is heard singing
Let her come in.

**Laertes** What is that noise?

*Enter Ophelia*

O, the heat can dry up my brains, tears burn out my eyes. By Heaven, I will avenge your suffering until our retribution outweighs our burden. Dear maid, kind sister, sweet Ophelia, O Heavens, is it possible that a young maid’s sanity is as vulnerable as an old man’s life? Love is nature at its finest, and where there is genuine love, the beloved takes some precious part of it away with them when they are gone, taking away part of the other person.

**Ophelia** (sings)

*They bore him barefaced on the bier,*

*And in his grave rained many a tear.*

Farewell, my dove.

**Laertes** Even if you had your wits and were to impel me to revenge, it could not make my desire for it burn any more intensely.

**Ophelia** (addressing bystanders) You must sing ‘a - down a - down’, and you ‘call him a - down - a’. O, how the varied rhythm becomes it! It is about the disloyal steward that stole his master’s daughter.

**Laertes** These nonsensical words would seem to hold some deeper meaning.

**Ophelia** There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance. Pray you, love, remember. And there are pansies; that’s for thoughts. (she distributes the various herbs and flowers to those around her)

**Laertes** A lesson in madness. Such thoughts and remembrances are fitting to my father.

**Ophelia** Then there’s fennel for you, and columbines. There’s rue for you. And here’s some for me. We may call it herb of grace on Sundays. You must wear your rue with a difference. There’s a daisy. I would give you some violets but they all withered when my father died. They say he died a good death. (sings)

*For bonny sweet Robin is all my joy.*

**Laertes** Even enduring this sadness and affliction, Hell itself she turns to favour and to prettiness.

**Ophelia** (sings)

*And will he not come again?*

*And will he not come again?*

*No, no, he is dead,*

*Go to thy death-bed,*

*He will never come again.*
His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll.
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan.
God have mercy on his soul.
And of all Christian souls. Goodbye.

Exit Ophelia

Laertes Do you see this, O God?

King Laertes, I must share in your grief or you deny me my right. Whatever you decide to do next, choose your wisest and most trusted associates and they shall judge between you and me. If they find that, whether by my own hand or through someone who has acted on my behalf, I am guilty of your father’s murder, I will relinquish my kingdom, my crown, my life, and everything I regard as my own, to you in compensation. But if not, be content to simply lend us your patience, and together we shall endeavour to satisfy your desire for the retribution you are due.

Laertes Let this be so. The way my father died, his clandestine burial - no memorial, no sword or hatchment over his tomb, no formal ceremony, no noble rite - cries to be heard as though from Heaven to Earth. I must have answers.

King So you shall. Upon whoever is responsible for the offence, let the full weight of our vengeance fall. I pray you join with me.

Scene 6

Enter Horatio and a Servant

Horatio Who is it that wishes to speak with me?

Servant Seafaring men, sir. They say they have letters for you.

Horatio Let them come in.

Exit Servant

I do not know from what part of the world I should be greeted, unless they are from Lord Hamlet.

Enter Sailors

First Sailor God bless you, sir.

Horatio Let him bless thee too.
First Sailor He shall, sir, if it pleases him. There’s a letter for you sir (hands over letter). It came from the ambassador who was bound for England; if your name be Horatio, as I am told it is.

Horatio (reads the letter)
*Horatio, when you have read this, allow these fellows access to the King. They have letters for him. Before we had been at sea two days, some pirates eager to engage us in combat gave us chase. Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we were compelled to fight, and during the struggle I boarded their ship. Once they were clear of our ship, I alone became their prisoner. They dealt with me mercifully but only to serve their own ends; they knew what they were doing: I am to do a turn for them. Let the King have the letters I have sent, then come and meet me as quickly as you possibly can. I have things to tell you which will astound you; mere words do not do them justice. These good fellows will bring you to where I am. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hold their course for England. Of them I have much to tell you. Farewell.
He that knowest thine,*

Hamlet

Come, I will see to it that you are able to deliver these letters, and do it promptly that you may direct me to the person from whom you brought them.

Scene 7

Enter King and Laertes

King Now you must acknowledge that I am in no way to blame for your father’s death and accept me as a friend, since I’ve shared with you some very sensitive information: that he who killed your father also threatened my life.

Laertes It certainly appears so. But tell me why you did not take appropriate action against this threat. His deeds were undeniably criminal and of sufficient gravity to warrant execution. Your own safety, and consequently the stability of your entire kingdom, was placed in serious jeopardy.

King O, for two special reasons which may, to you, perhaps seem somewhat trifling, but which, nevertheless, matter a great deal to me. The Queen his mother dotes on him, and as for me, whether it is due to my kindness or my improvidence, I could never do anything to harm or to upset her; she’s such an important, integral part of my life and soul, she makes me what I am; she’s my inspiration. My other motive for not putting myself in a position where I would have to justify my actions to the people were I to sanction any harsh punishment of Hamlet, is the adoration, the admiration, they have for him. Their love of him is such they are rather disposed not to recognise his faults. In their eyes he is irreproachable and quite exemplary. His misdeeds and disreputable behaviour go largely unnoticed or are ignored; his faults might as well be graces. As far as they’re concerned he can do no wrong. Any punishment I impose risks attracting their displeasure and condemnation. It could provoke a very unfavourable response; I might be inviting some undesirable consequences. It could severely damage my public image. I might not end up getting rid of my problems at all.
Laertes And so have I a noble father lost, a sister driven to distraction. Her beauty and perfection were unrivalled. But my revenge will come.

King Do not loose sleep over that. You must not consider us so easily daunted and lacking in spirit or resolve that we will regard being insulted and threatened as unimportant. Before long, we will receive news from England. I loved your father; we value our own highly, and this, I hope, will teach you to think of…..

Enter a Messenger with letters

Messenger These to your Majesty, this to the Queen.

King From Hamlet! Who brought them?

Messenger Sailors, my lord, they say. I did not see them. They were given me by Claudio. He received them from whoever brought them.

King Laertes, you shall hear what they contain. Leave us.

Exit Messenger

(reads) High and mighty (addressing the King sarcastically), you shall know I am returning to your kingdom deprived of all my belongings. Tomorrow I shall beg leave to see your Majesty in person, when I shall, first asking your pardon, thereunto recount the occasion of my sudden and more strange return.

Hamlet

What could this mean? Have those that went with him also come back? Or is it some kind of trick?

Laertes Do you recognise the handwriting?

King It is Hamlet’s. ‘deprived of all my belongings’, and in a postscript here he says ‘alone’. Can you advise me as to what this means?

Laertes I’m at a loss to explain it, my lord. But let him come. It warms the very sickness of my heart that I shall be able to tell him to his face that he will die for what he has done.

King If this is so, Laertes - and how could it be so, how otherwise (the King is confounded by this completely unexpected turn of events)? Will you act under my direction?

Laertes Yes, my lord, if you will not overrule my intentions and constrain me to keep peace with Hamlet.

King It is your own peace that is our concern. If he has by now returned, after breaking off from his voyage to England, and he has no intention of undertaking the passage again, then I’ll implement a stratagem I’ve just contrived. I will manoeuvre
him into a situation whereby he will face certain defeat; and over his death there will be no suggestion of blame or wrongdoing, no suspicion of underhandedness. Even his mother will have no cause to indict anybody for it and will absolve his killer, conceding that it was merely a tragic accident.

**Laertes** My lord, I will submit myself to your device, all the more if you could engineer it so that I might be the instrument of Hamlet’s demise.

**King** Then it will all work out perfectly. You have been talked of a great deal since you left us on your travels and, as Hamlet himself has heard, in glowing terms, people having nothing but good things to say about you, lavishing your name with praise. Even the sum of all your qualities, your accomplishments, the wealth and privileges you enjoy, never inspired such envy in him as did this, and that, in my view, is quite unbecoming and unworthy of him.

**Laertes** Why should he be envious, my lord?

**King** It’s mere egotism, a typical aspect of youth, which is unavoidable for youth naturally lends itself to a carefree attitude and outlook, just as maturity is characterised by a more subdued, sensible and serious temperament. Two months ago there was a gentleman here from Normandy. I have seen the French in battle, I’ve served against them, and they are very proficient, very skilful, on horseback; but this gallant individual had witchcraft, or so it would seem. He’d clearly grown into the saddle, and performed such wondrous feats with his horse, demonstrating such extraordinary ability it was as though they were embodied as one, as though he shared the very nature of the brave beast. He exceed what I would have believed possible to such a degree that I could not have even imagined what I saw him do.

**Laertes** A Norman was it?

**King** A Norman, yes.

**Laertes** Upon my life, Lamord.

**King** The very same.

**Laertes** I know him well. He is indeed the jewel of all the nation.

**King** He revealed that he knew you, and gave you such a masterly report for swordsmanship, for your skill with the rapier in particular, that he declared: ‘it would be a sight indeed if anyone could match you’. The swordsmen of their nation he swore had neither the motion, the guard, nor the eye to challenge you. Sir, this report of his did so envenom the already envious Hamlet that he could do nothing but hope and pray for your prompt return so that he may engage you in swordplay to try and prove himself against you. Now to another matter.

**Laertes** What other matter, my lord?
King  Laertes, was you father dear to you? Or do you merely project an outward appearance of sorrow, which does not reflect your true feelings, a face without a heart, so to speak?

Laertes  Why do you ask this?

King  It’s not that I think you did not love your father, but I know love to be the product of circumstances and I’ve seen how time lessens the spark and fire of it. If we compare it to a candle, within the very flame of love there is a wick that will abate it, since it will burn down over time. Love will not last indefinitely, for it grows to a point where it tries to exceed its limits and simply burns itself out. What we intend to do we should do while we have the desire, for our intentions are so readily diverted and subject to an abundance of hindrances, and influences which abate them. And finally all of our chances are lost, leaving us with a heavy heart, a sense of regret over the opportunities to do what we should have done that we’ve wasted. But to our main concern. When Hamlet comes back, just what are you prepared to undertake to show in deed your love for and duty to your father?

Laertes  To cut his throat in the church.

King  Indeed there is no place which should offer him sanctuary; revenge should have no bounds. But good Laertes, will you do this: will you remain inside your chamber. When Hamlet returns, it shall be made known to him that you also have come home. We’ll stir his displeasure, inflame his resentment and envy by having people extol your virtues, praising your excellence and exaggerating the reputation the Frenchman gave you, then, finally, bring the two of you together to fight a duel and place a wager on your heads. He, being remiss, unsuspecting and guileless, will not peruse the swords, so you can easily select the rapier which is not blunted; perhaps trying out a few others so it will not appear as though you knowingly chose any particular one; and during the match, as if done quite inadvertently, with a thrust of your sword you will requite him for your father.

Laertes  I’ll do it. And for that purpose, I’ll anoint my sword. I bought an oil from a mountebank (bogus doctor), which is so deadly that you have only to dip a knife in it and where it draws blood, even the most potent medicine, produced from the finest medicinal herbs, gathered under moonlight to enhance their powers of healing, cannot save the victim from death, even if they are but scratched by the anointed blade. I’ll apply this lethal substance to the tip of my sword. I need only cut him slightly and it will mean certain death.

King  We must think very carefully about this. If we should fail and our objective is exposed because the plan is not competently executed, it would be infinitely more desirable for us to have never attempted it. Therefore, this project should have a back-up strategy, something which will ensure its success should your efforts prove ineffective. So then, let me see. As I said, we’ll place a substantial wager on your skills. This will give him yet further incentive to fight all the harder. (pauses in thought) I have it! At some point during the contest when you are both hot and thirsty, as you make your bouts more violent to that end, and he calls for a drink, I’ll have prepared him a chalice of poisoned wine specially for this occasion, whereupon
he has but to sip of it, and if he does happen to escape your poisoned blade, our purpose can still be realised. Wait, what’s that noise?

Enter Queen

Queen One sorrow treads upon the heels of another, so quickly they follow. Your sister has drowned, Laertes.

Laertes Drowned? O, where?

Queen There is a willow tree leaning over the brook. Its hoary leaves are reflected in the glassy stream. She used those leaves to make fantastic garlands of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies and long-purples, for which the shepherds, being uncultured and unrefined, have a more crude name; but our unmarried maids call them ‘dead men’s fingers’. There, while clambering to hang the wreaths she had fashioned on the bough overhanging the stream, it appears a thin branch supporting her weight broke and, along with her floral works, she fell into the swollen brook. Her clothes would have spread out wide in the water, keeping her afloat for a while, during which time she was heard chanting snatches of old lauds, as though insensible to her own distress. It could not have been long before her garments filled with water and pulled the poor wretch under, as she simply lay there singing, down to a muddy death.

Laertes Alas, then she’s drowned.

Queen Drowned, tragically drowned.

Laertes There has already been too much water, Poor Ophelia; I must withhold my tears. Yet this is a part of our nature, too strong to deny, despite the shame of it. (weeps) When I’ve regained my composure, I’ll be rid of this feminine weakness, this unmanly emotion which afflicts me. Goodbye, my lord. I have a speech of fire I am eager to deliver to my supporters but this foolishness dampens it; I would hardly be an inspiration to them like this.

Exit Laertes

King We’d better go after him, Gertrude. If you knew how much I had to do to calm his anger. Now I fear this will drive him once more into an enraged and reckless state. We should follow him.
Act 5

Scene 1

(the graveyard, in the grounds of the church)

Enter the Gravedigger and Another

Gravedigger  Is she to have a Christian burial, when she wilfully seeks her own damnation?

Other  I tell you she is, so make her grave at once. The coroner has delivered his verdict and finds that it is to be a Christian burial.

Gravedigger  How can that be, unless she drowned herself in self-defence?

Other  It is so found.

Gravedigger  It must be self-defence, it cannot be anything else. For here lies the point: if I drown myself, then I’m carrying out a deliberate act. Therefore, her drowning was the result of her own witting action.

Other  No, but listen.

Gravedigger  Allow me to explain. Here you have the water, and here you have the man, okay. If the man goes into the water and drowns himself, whether or not it is
intentional, he is still committing the act. Consider that. But if the water comes to him and drowns him, then he is not drowning himself. Therefore, he is not guilty of causing his own death.

Other But is this the law?

Gravedigger It certainly is; coroner’s inquest law.

Other But have you interpreted it correctly? If this had not been a woman of good social standing, she would not have been given a Christian burial.

Gravedigger Well, there you have it. More’s the pity that upper class folk should have more right in this world to drown or hang themselves that they be shown greater respect and tolerance than their fellow Christian. Come, hand me my spade. There are no gentlemen but gardeners, ditches and gravemakers to carry on the ancient profession of Adam (working with the earth as Adam had to after having been cast out of the Garden of Eden: Genesis: 3: 23: So the Lord God drove him out from that garden of delight, to cultivate the ground from which he came).

He digs

Other Was he a gentleman?

Gravedigger He was the first that ever bore arms.

Other Why, he had none.

Gravedigger What, are you a heathen? How do you understand the Scripture? The Scripture says Adam dug. Could he dig without arms? I’ll put another question to you. If you cannot give me the answer, you must confess that I have outwitted you.

Other Proceed.

Gravedigger What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright or the carpenter?

Other The gallows-maker, for that frame outlives a thousand tenants.

Gravedigger I truly like your wit, the gallows is a good answer. But how is it good? It is good for those guilty of wrongdoing. Now, you are incorrect in saying the gallows is built stronger than the church (in the sense the church outlives more through the number of funeral services it holds); therefore, the gallows may be good for you. Try again, come on.

Other Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright or a carpenter?

Gravedigger Ay, tell me and be done with it.

Other Yes, I believe I know.
Gravedigger  Well, say it then.

Other  By the Mass, I cannot think of it.

Gravedigger  Rack your brains no more, your dull mind cannot be forced to work beyond its abilities. When next you are asked this question, say 'a gravemaker’. The houses he makes last until doomsday. Go and fetch me a bottle of liquor.

Exit Other

The Gravedigger continues digging

(sings)
In youth when I did love, did love,
Methought it was very sweet;
To contract - o - the time for - a - my behave,
O methought there - a - was nothing - a - meet.
('o' and 'a' represent the sounds he makes through the effort of digging)

Enter Hamlet and Horatio

Hamlet  Has this fellow no respect for his business that he sings in grave-making?

Horatio  He’s so accustomed to his work he simply no longer thinks about it.

Hamlet  It is true that the less experienced you are in a task, the more inclined you are to give it thought and concentrate on it.

Gravedigger  (sings)
But age with his stealing steps
Hath clawed me in his clutch,
And has shipped me to the land,
As if I had never been such.

He throws up a skull

Hamlet  That skull had a tongue in it and could sing once. How the knave carelessly tosses it to the ground, as though it were the jawbone with which Cain committed the first murder (biblical reference: Genesis: 4: 8: Then Cain said to his brother ‘let us go out together’ and while they were out in the open, Cain turned upon his brother Abel and killed him - evokes the idea of murdering one's own brother, the basis of the whole play. The crime of Claudius mirrors that of Cain). This might be the pate of a politician over whom this fool is now elevated, one that would seek to cheat even God, might it not?

Horatio  It might, my lord.

Hamlet  Or of a courtier, who could say ‘good morning, my lord. How are you, my lord?’ Might it not?
Horatio  Ay, my lord.

Hamlet  And now they’re jawless and knocked about with a sexton’s spade. Reduced to nothing. Were these bones bred to be worth so little that they should be treated in this way? It seems so dehumanising and degrading.

Gravedigger  (sings)
A pickaxe and a spade, a spade,
For and a shrouding-sheet,
O a pit of clay to be made
For such a guest is meet.

Throws up another skull

Hamlet  There’s another. Why, might that not be the skull of a lawyer? Where are his quibbles now, his arguments about what things really mean, his cases, his tenures and his tricks? Why does he suffer this mad knave now, knocking him about the head with a dirty shovel, and can no longer tell him he is liable to legal proceedings for his action of battery? Hmm, this fellow might have been, in his time, a great buyer of land and property, with his statutes, his recognizances, his fines, his indentures cut in two, his recoveries; who capitalised on his legal expertise for his own personal gain. Is this the final outcome of his fines and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? Will his vouchers vouch no more his purchases? (Hamlet is toying with a variety of legal terms) I will speak to this fellow. Who’s grave is this?

Gravedigger  Mine, sir.  (sings)
O a pit of clay for to be made.

Hamlet  I think it is indeed yours, for you are in it.

Gravedigger  You are out of it, sir, and therefore it is not yours. As for me, I do not lie in it, yet it is mine.

Hamlet  You do not lie in it, yet you say it is yours. It is for the dead, not for the living; therefore you’re lying.

Gravedigger  It is a trivial lie, sir.

Hamlet  What man are you digging it for?

Gravedigger  For no man, sir.

Hamlet  For what woman then?

Gravedigger  For none neither.

Hamlet  Who is to be buried in it?

Gravedigger  One that was a woman, sir, but rest her soul, she’s dead.
**Hamlet**  How precise the knave is. We must be exact or equivocation will undo us. These last few years, I’ve noticed how many of the distinctions between the poor and the upper-classes have faded. For how long have you been a grave-maker?

**Gravedigger**  I started the day our last King Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.

**Hamlet**  How long ago was that?

**Gravedigger**  Do you not know that? Every fool knows that. It was the very day that young Hamlet was born; he that is mad and was sent to England.

**Hamlet**  Yes. Why was he sent to England?

**Gravedigger**  Why, because he was mad. He shall recover his wits there. But if he does not, it’s of no great concern there.

**Hamlet**  Why?

**Gravedigger**  It will not be noticed in him there. There, the men are as mad as he.

**Hamlet**  How did he come to be mad?

**Gravedigger**  Very strangely, they say.

**Hamlet**  In what way was it strange?

**Gravedigger**  Well, he no longer even knew who he was.

**Hamlet**  Where was he when this happened?

**Gravedigger**  Why, here in Denmark. I’ve been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years.

**Hamlet**  How long will a man lie in the earth before he rots?

**Gravedigger**  Well, if he’s not rotten before he dies; as we have many diseased corpses nowadays that are almost rotten before they’re even buried; he’ll last you some eight or nine year. A tanner (someone who tans animal skins, to produce leather) will last you nine year.

**Hamlet**  Why he longer than another?

**Gravedigger**  Why, sir, his own skin has itself become so tanned with his trade that he’ll keep out water a great while, and water is the worse decayer of your dead body. Here’s a skull now which has lay in the earth three and twenty years.

**Hamlet**  Whose was it?

**Gravedigger**  A mad fellow it was. Whose do you think it was?
**Hamlet**  I do not know.

**Gravedigger**  Damn him, for he was a mad rogue! He poured a bottle of Rhenish wine on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick’s skull, the King’s jester.

**Hamlet**  This?

_Takes the skull_

**Gravedigger**  The very same.

**Hamlet**  Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio; a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He has borne me on his back a thousand times, and now…..how abhorrent this is. My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how often. Where are your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that would set the court roaring with laughter? Is there is no one now to laugh at your own grinning? Now get to my lady’s chamber and tell her to paint her face with make-up an inch thick. She’ll end up looking like this. Make her laugh at _that_. Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.

**Horatio**  What’s that, my lord?

**Hamlet**  Do you suppose Alexander the Great looked like this after he had been buried?

**Horatio**  Most probably.

**Hamlet**  And smelt so bad?

_Puts down the skull_

**Horatio**  Probably, my lord.

**Hamlet**  To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Could we not trace the natural course undergone by the ashes of Alexander the Great until we find them merely stopping a bunghole somewhere?

**Horatio**  That seems very imaginative.

**Hamlet**  No, not at all, I’m simply looking at the process ensuing his interment in the ground, and contemplating what is likely to have become of him. Alexander died, he was buried, his body returned to dust, the dust is earth, from the earth we get loam to produce bricks and plaster, and is it not then possible that the loam to which he was eventually converted has since been made into a stopper for a beer-barrel? Even the imperious Julius Caesar, dead and long since turned to clay, might at this time be stopping a hole to keep out the draught. Just think; that that earth which was once a figure whose exploits and renown kept the world in awe might now be patching up a wall somewhere to keep out the winter cold. But hold on; let’s remain quiet for a moment. Here comes the King, the Queen, the courtiers.
Enter Bearers with a coffin, a Priest, King, Queen, Laertes and Lords

Whose coffin is this they follow? And with so few of the traditional funeral rites being observed? This betokens the fact that the person whose body they follow did in desperation take their own life. It was a person of some wealth and status. We’ll stay out of sight a while and observe.

Laertes Where is the rest of the ceremony, all of the customary observances of such an occasion?

Hamlet That’s Laertes, a very noble youth. Watch him.

Laertes Where is the rest of the ceremony?

Priest We’ve granted her as many obsequies as we have authorisation to. The precise circumstances of her death are in doubt (it is suspected she committed suicide, which would mean traditional funeral rites being withheld); and unless the King decrees that convention shall not be complied with in this case, she should remain in unsanctified ground until the Earth’s final day. We are to eschew the normal ceremonial prayers at her graveside and simply throw shards, flints and pebbles onto her, though she is allowed a wreath in the church and flowers scattered on her grave as a sign of her chastity, along with the tolling of the church bell to mark her death.

Laertes Must there be no more than that?

Priest Nothing more is to be done. We would profane the dead were we to hold a requiem for her and confer upon her the same rites and respect as those who have left this world at peace with God.

Laertes Lay her in the earth, and from her fair and unpolluted flesh may violets spring. I tell you, churlish priest, my sister shall be an angel in Heaven while you lie damned in Hell.

Hamlet What, the fair Ophelia!

Queen (scattering flowers) Sweets to the sweet. Farewell. I had hoped you would be my Hamlet’s wife: I thought I’d be decking your marriage bed with flowers, sweet maid, not scattering them on your grave.

Laertes May tremendous woe and suffering befall that cursed individual whose wicked deed deprived you of your sanity. Hold off the earth a while, until I have embraced her once more in my arms.

Leaps into the grave

Now pile your dirt upon both of us, until you have made this ground into a mountain to overtop Mount Pelion or even the gigantic, towering head of Mount Olympus.
Hamlet  Who are you that your grief be so emphatic and impassioned, that your
expression of sorrow be enough to bring the planets to a standstill and make them
listen in wonder at your anguish? It is I, Hamlet the Dane.

Laertes  The devil take your soul (grappling with him)!

Hamlet  You do not pray well. I would ask that you take your fingers from my throat,
for though I am not irascible and rash, I have in me something dangerous, which you
would be wise to fear. Let go of me.

King  Pull them apart.

Queen  Hamlet! Hamlet!

All  Gentlemen!

Horatio  My lord, calm yourself.

Hamlet  Why, I will fight with him over this until I have no more life left in me.

Queen  O, my son, over what?

Hamlet  I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers could not with all of their love
combined make up my sum. What will you do for her?

King  O, he is mad, Laertes.

Queen  For the love of God, let him go.

Hamlet  God’s wounds, show me what you’ll do. Will you weep, will you fight, will
you fast? I’ll do it. Do you come here to whine, to outface me with leaping in her
grave? Be buried alive with her and so will I. And if you want to prate of mountains,
let them throw millions of acres on us, until our ground, its pinnacle scorched in the
heat of the sun, thoroughly dwarfs Mount Ossa (stood opposite Mount Olympus in
ancient Greece). If you can display such pomposity and come out with this kind of
rhetoric, I can rant just as well.

Queen  This is mere madness, the fit will last for a while. Shortly he will recover his
composure and acquire a mood of sedateness and patience.

Hamlet  Tell me sir, for what reason do you attack me in this way? I always loved
you. But it is no matter. Make these dramatic and grandiose speeches if you must, a
person’s nature cannot be suppressed.

Exit Hamlet

King  I pray you, Horatio, look after him.

Exit Horatio
(to Laertes) Strengthen your patience with thought of what we discussed last night. We’ll put our plan into effect right away. Gertrude, be sure to watch over you son. This grave shall have a lasting monument. It will be quiet for the next hour or so. During this time we’ll remain patient.

Scene 2

(somewhere inside the castle)

*Enter* Hamlet and Horatio

**Hamlet** So much for this, sir. Now you shall see the other side to what’s going on here. I’ll tell you about the things to which I made reference in my letter. You do remember all the circumstances?

**Horatio** Remember them, my lord, I do!

**Hamlet** In my heart there was much unease and agitation; it would not let me sleep. I felt I was in a worse position than the shackled mutineers. Rashly - and praised be rashness for it; it should be pointed out that our indiscretion sometimes serves us well when our contrivances do not meet with the success we envisaged, and that should make us realise that there exists a Divine power that shapes our destiny, regardless of how we try to conduct our affairs -

**Horatio** That is most certain.

**Hamlet** I left my cabin, my sea-gown wrapped around me, groping my way through the dark to find where Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were sleeping, intending to get my hands on the official document they were carrying. Eventually succeeding, I withdrew to my own room, having the audacity, my fears for my life overriding any consideration for the unlawful nature of my actions, to unseal their commission. It was the royal knavery I expected, the whole thing a treacherous, perfidious affair. The letter, I discovered, was an explicit, unambiguous command from the King, advancing all sorts of overstated and fictitious reasons concerning the security of both Denmark and England, that as soon as it had been read, without delay, without waiting even for the sharpening of the axe, my head should be cut off.

**Horatio** Is it possible?

**Hamlet** Here’s the commission, read it at your leisure. But will you now hear how I proceeded?

**Horatio** I beseech you, tell me.

**Hamlet** Being so entangled with this villainy and deceit, my mind having started to work even before I had a chance to properly consider what would be the most advisable course of action, I sat myself down, devised a new commission and wrote it out in very neat, official-looking script. I once thought, as our politicians do, that it was quite unnecessary to have really good handwriting, and had deliberately ignored
and dismissed the skill, but sir, now it did me an invaluable service. Do you want to know what I wrote?

**Horatio** Ay, certainly, my lord.

**Hamlet** That this is an earnest plea from the King of Denmark; that, seeing as England was his faithful tributary, and in order that love between them, like the palm-tree, might flourish (biblical allusion: Psalms: 92: 13: The innocent man will flourish as the palm tree flourishes; he will grow to greatness as the cedars grow on Lebanon), that they remain firmly united in peace and friendship; and I continued with many such grand and elaborate, portentous ideas; having read and understood the contents of this official letter, he should, without deliberation, order the immediate execution of its bearers, not allowing them time even to confess their sins.

**Horatio** How was the letter sealed?

**Hamlet** Why, even in that the will of Heaven was in my favour. I had my father’s signet in my purse, which bears the Danish seal. I folded the letter I had written in the same way as the original document, then signed it, impressed the seal upon it and, returning to where I had obtained it, put it in place of the real commission, the exchange unbeknown to anyone. Now the next day was our sea-fight, the subsequent events you know already.

**Horatio** So Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go to their deaths.

**Hamlet** Why, man, they did eagerly and willingly accept this assignment. My conscience is untroubled by their fate; their defeat issues from their own interference in my affairs with the King. It is dangerous when lesser people meddle in the vicious, intense fighting of powerful opponents.

**Horatio** Why, what sort of a king is this!

**Hamlet** He has killed my father and made a whore of my mother, deprived me of the throne, stealing the election and denying me my wish to succeed my father, endeavoured to engineer my death, and with such conniving and subterfuge. Is it not with a guiltless conscience that I might kill him myself? Is it not now my obligation? Would it not make me worthy of condemnation were I to let this immoral, unprincipled figure live to perpetrate further evil?

**Horatio** Shortly he will receive news from England regarding the outcome of this business.

**Hamlet** Then I have the intervening time to act. A man’s life is no more than an effort to seek that one opportunity where he might make his mark, where he might achieve something of some consequence or value, where he might make a difference. But I deeply regret, Horatio, that my behaviour towards Laertes was most unbecoming and inexcusable. I simply forgot myself. In light of my own cause I can understand that he too must avenge his father’s death. I’ll court his favour. But certainly the bravado and the egotism that was his display of grief did rouse in me an intense, consuming rage.
Horatio Peace (used to tell someone to be quiet), who comes here?

Enter Osric, a courtier

Osric Your Lordship is most welcome back in Denmark.

Hamlet I humbly thank you sir. Do you know this water-fly (mosquito)?

Horatio No, my lord.

Hamlet Yours is the more desirable position, for it is a vice to know him. He has much fertile land. Provided a man has considerable wealth to elevate his social status above that of his fellow man, to whom he is otherwise in no way superior, he will be welcome at the King’s banquet. He is still a peasant, but, as I say, one who owns much land.

Osric Sweet lord, if your lordship is presently at leisure, I have a message I would impart to you from his Majesty.

Hamlet I will receive it, sir, and listen attentively to it. You may replace your hat (customarily removed when greeting someone).

Osric I thank your lordship, it is very hot.

Hamlet No, believe me, it is very cold, the wind is northerly.

Osric It is rather cold, my lord, indeed.

Hamlet And yet I think it is very sultry and hot for my liking.

Osric Exceedingly, my lord, it is very sultry, as it happens. I cannot tell how. My lord, his Majesty bade me to convey to you that he has placed a substantial wager on your head. Sir, this is the matter…..

Hamlet (gesturing to him to put his hat back on) I beseech you remember (that etiquette dictates one should replace their hat once the greeting is over).

Osric No, thank you my lord, I am more comfortable without it, honestly. Sir, Laertes has recently arrived here; believe me, an absolute gentleman, most distinguished, of very pleasant manners and fine appearance. Indeed, if my true sentiments be known, he is a model gentleman; he is the card or calendar of gentry; for you shall find in him the totality of that which you would hope to see in a such an individual.

Hamlet Sir, your judgement of him is most favourable, though I am well aware that trying to list all of his qualities would stupefy the mind; it would prove too demanding a task to recall each of them. To be frank, I consider him to be a singular individual, imbued with such rare and exceptional virtues that, to speak truthfully of him, I would
say that, apart from his reflection in the mirror, there is nobody who can match him, nor could anyone hope to follow in his footsteps, to accomplish what he has.

Osric Your lordship speaks most infallibly of him.

Hamlet Why is it that we are so concerned about him? What warrants our speaking of the gentleman in such raw (unreserved and direct) terms?

Osric Sir?

Horatio Are you not capable of understanding this sort of language? You must try harder sir, really.

Hamlet For what specific reason is this gentleman of interest to us?

Osric Laertes?

Horatio His purse is already empty, he’s expended all of his fine words.

Hamlet Him, sir.

Osric I know you are not ignorant…..

Hamlet I would hope you do, sir. Yet, in truth, whether you do or not, it is of no great concern to me. Well, sir?

Osric That you are not ignorant of Laertes’ excellence…..

Hamlet I dare not confess that, lest I should compare with him in excellence; for to know a man well, one must know oneself.

Osric I mean, sir, with regard to his use of weaponry; though by the reckoning of those around him, he’s unequalled in all respects.

Hamlet What’s his weapon?

Osric Rapier and dagger.

Hamlet That’s two of his weapons. But never mind.

Osric The King, sir, has wagered with him six Barbary horses, against which Laertes himself has staked, as I understand it, six French rapiers and poniards (type of small dagger), with their accessories: girdle, hanger (scabbard or sheath, which is strapped to the girdle), and so forth. Three of the carriages, truly, are very desirable. They combine very attractively with the hilts and are most exquisite, beautifully crafted and elaborate in their design.

Hamlet What exactly do you mean by “carriages”?

Horatio I knew you would need some of his language explaining.
Osric  The carriages, sir, are the hangers.

Hamlet  The phrase would be more suitable if what you refer to as a ‘carriage’ enabled us to carry a cannon at our sides (since, in more conventional terms, a carriage is something upon which a cannon is mounted). Until it does, it would be more appropriate to call them ‘hangers’. But go on. Six Barbary horses against six French swords, their accessories, and three beautifully crafted, imaginatively named, carriages. That’s the French bet against the Danish. What are the specific terms of the wager?

Osric  The King, sir, has bet, sir, that in a dozen bouts, Laertes shall not win more than three against you; he has bet on you winning nine of the twelve. And the match will take place immediately should your lordship accept the challenge.

Hamlet  Sir, I will be going for a walk here in the hall. If it pleases his Majesty, I take my exercise at this time of day. In the meantime, let the swords be brought, if Laertes is still willing, and the King fulfil what he has committed himself to; I will win for him if I can; if not, I will incur nothing but the embarrassment of losing and the odd hit.

Osric  Is this the reply you wish me to take back to the King?

Hamlet  Yes, or words to that effect, sir, embellished with whatever fancy expressions you wish.

Osric  I submit my services to your lordship.

Hamlet  Very well.

Exit Osric

He impresses nobody but himself.

Horatio  Look how the young fool runs away, with the hat on his head.

Hamlet  He tries to seem cultured and sophisticated yet succeeds only in being irritatingly pretentious and self-satisfied, his character superficial. This results from the fact that, as with many people of a similar age and background whose nature and manner accord with the tone of these decadent times, he has only picked up these expressions, and learned to talk in this fashion, from the people with whom he associates, who use these phrases with some frequency. It’s creative but frivolous, meaningless jargon, lacking in intellectual substance, which supposedly will allow them to seem less out of place in the company of genuinely refined, highly educated men, where, in employing these fine words, it’s obvious they are devoid of independent thought.

Enter a Lord
Lord My lord, young Osric having conveyed to you the King’s message and reported back that you will attend him in the hall, his Majesty has sent me to enquire as to whether you still wish to compete against Laertes or you need more time to make up your mind.

Hamlet I shall fulfil that to which I have committed myself, the King’s pleasure is foremost. If Laertes is ready, so am I. He can challenge me now or whenever he wishes, provided I am as able to accommodate him as I am at present.

Lord The King and Queen are all coming down.

Hamlet I’m delighted to hear it.

Lord The Queen desires that you be considerate towards Laertes, that you perhaps offer some words of peace and reconciliation before you commence the match.

Hamlet She advises me well.

Exit Lord

Horatio You will lose, my lord.

Hamlet I do not think so. Since he went to France, I have been in continual practice. I shall win the necessary number of bouts. If only you knew how apprehensive I am about the whole thing; but it does not matter.

Horatio No, my lord.

Hamlet It is but foolishness. Nevertheless, I have such misgivings, such a sense of foreboding, that it would perhaps trouble even a woman.

Horatio If you have reservations about anything, do not ignore them. I will forestall their arrival and say that you are not ready.

Hamlet Absolutely not. We defy portents. It may serve us favourably that one cannot depart this life unless it is the will of God. If now is my time, then my death is unavoidable. If now is not my time; inevitably, it will still come. We must simply be ready (biblical allusion: Matthew 24: 44: And you too must stand ready; the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him). Since this life makes no sense to any of us, what does it matter if we die early? Whatever my fate, let it be.

Enter King, Queen, Laertes, Osric, all of the Courtiers, and Attendants carrying duelling swords and daggers

King Come, Hamlet, come and take this hand from me.

Puts Laertes’ hand into Hamlet’s

Hamlet Give me your pardon, sir. I have done you wrong, but pardon it as you are a gentleman. Those present know, and you must have heard, how I am punished with a
severe affliction of the mind and consequently given to highly irrational behaviour. What I have done to incur your wrath and condemnation, I hereby proclaim can be ascribed to madness. It was never the real Hamlet who wronged Laertes (this is a public apology). If I loose my sense of reason, my capacity to think and act rationally, and, when I am not myself, do wrong Laertes, then I do it not. I deny culpability. In fact, nobody is to be held accountable, for it is simply the result of my madness, in which case, I am the one who is wronged; by insanity. My madness is the enemy. Sir, before this audience, let my disclamation of premeditated evil intent against your father restore between us a sense of harmony and goodwill. I am aware that, having been without the capacities of forethought and sound judgement, I went too far, inflicting upon my brother (fellow man) quite unintended suffering.

Laertes As a son, my father’s murder should stir me to my revenge, but I am satisfied by the explanation you have offered in your defence, and for the sake of my honour and respectability will forbear vengeance, though I desire no reconcilement unless some highly respected and trusted senior court officials can pronounce that there exists a precedent for the restitution of peace between two parties under such circumstances that would leave my reputation undamaged. But until such time, I do acknowledge your offer of friendship and will bear you no ill will.

Hamlet I will fight honourably in this brother’s wager. Give us the foils.

Laertes Come, one for me.

Hamlet I’ll be your foil (in the sense of his being a character who contrasts with Laertes, thereby accentuating his qualities), Laertes. In comparison to my mediocre abilities your skill shall, like a star in the darkest night, shine with dazzling brilliance.

Laertes You mock me, sir.

Hamlet No, you are not mocked by me.

King Give them the swords, young Osric. Cousin Hamlet, you know the terms of the wager?

Hamlet Very well, my lord. Your grace has backed the weaker side.

King I do not believe so. I have seen you both; but since he is reputed to possess the superior skill, the terms under which you must win allow for you to lose the odd bout.

Laertes This is too heavy. Let me see another.

Hamlet This suits me well. These swords are all of a standard length?

Osric Yes, my good lord.

They prepare to duel

Enter Servants with flagons of wine

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King  Set me the stoups of wine upon that table. If Hamlet should win the first or second bout, let all the battlements fire their ordnance: the King shall drink to Hamlet’s good health, and into the cup a precious gem shall he throw worth more than any of the jewels which four successive kings have worn in Denmark’s crown - give me the cups - and let the kettledrum to the trumpet speak (the idea that its sound is to convey a signal), the trumpet to the kannoneer without (outside), the cannons to the heavens, the heavens to Earth: ‘Now the King drinks to Hamlet’ (the elaborate toast he will make after Hamlet wins the first or second exchange, creating a pause in proceedings during which he can try to persuade Hamlet to drink from the poisoned cup). Come, begin. And you, the judges, bear a wary eye.

Hamlet  Come on, sir.

Laertes  Come, my lord.

They duel

Hamlet  One.

Laertes  No.

Hamlet  Judgement.

Osric  A hit, a very palpable hit.

Laertes  Well, again.

King  Wait, give me drink. Hamlet, this pearl is yours. Here’s to your health.

Drums and trumpets sound, followed by cannon fire outside

Give him the cup.

Hamlet  I’ll fight this bout first (to King). Set it aside awhile. Come (to Laertes).

They duel again

Another hit. Was it not?

Laertes  I do confess it.

King  Our son shall win.

Queen  He’s sweating and short of breath. Here, Hamlet, take my napkin; wipe your brow. The Queen drinks to your good fortune, Hamlet.

Hamlet  Thank you, good madam.

King  Gertrude, do not drink.
Queen  I will, my lord, I pray you pardon me.

    She drinks and offers the cup to Hamlet

King  (aside) It is the poisoned cup. It is too late.

Hamlet  I dare not drink yet, madam. I will in a while.

Queen  Come, let me wipe your face.

Laertes  My lord, I’ll hit him now.

King  I doubt it.

Laertes  And yet it is almost against my conscience (aside).

Hamlet  Come, for the third, Laertes. You do but dally. I pray you attack with some determination. I fear you are not taking this too seriously.

Laertes  You think so? Then, come on.

    They duel

Osric  Nothing either way.

Laertes  I’ll have you now.

    Laertes wounds Hamlet. A scuffle ensues, during which they loose possession of their rapiers, which are then inadvertently exchanged

King  Part them; they are incensed.

Hamlet  No, come again.

    He wounds Laertes. The Queen collapses

Osric  Look, the Queen!

Horatio  They’re both bleeding. Are you all right, my lord?

Osric  Are you alright, Laertes?

Laertes  Why, I have been foolishly ensnared by my own trap, Osric. I am justly killed by my own treachery.

Hamlet  How is the Queen?

King  She swoons at seeing them bleed.

Queen  No, no, the drink, the drink! O my dear Hamlet! The drink! I am poisoned.
She dies

Hamlet  O villainy! Let the door be locked. Find who is responsible for this treachery!

Exit Osric

Laertes  Those responsible are before you, Hamlet. You have yourself been fatally wounded. No medicine in the world can save you. In you there is not half an hour’s life. The treacherous instrument is in your hand. Not only is the sword’s tip not blunted, it is envenomed. The foul practice has turned itself on me. I lie here never to rise again, knowing my death is at hand. Your mother has indeed been poisoned. I can be party to this no more. The King, the King’s to blame.

Hamlet  So the point is envenomed. Then, venom, to thy work.

Wounds the King

All  Treason! Treason!

King  You must still defend me, loyal subjects. I am but injured.

Hamlet  Here, you incestuous, murderous, damned Dane, drink of this potion. Follow my mother.

He forces the King to drink from the poisoned chalice. The King then dies

Laertes  He is justly punished. It is a poison prepared by himself. Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet. You are not to be blamed for mine and my father’s death, nor am I to be blamed for yours.

He dies

Hamlet  May Heaven absolve you of it. Shortly I will follow you. I am dead, Horatio. Wretched Queen, goodbye. You that look pale and shocked (addressing the court), horrified by these unexpected events, you are but an audience and play no role in these proceedings. If only I had more time - this cruel, merciless sergeant, Death (personifying death as an officer of the law), is strict in his arrest - O, there are things I could tell you, things I suddenly understand and foresee (when near death it was believed that one gained enlightenment and the ability to know the future); but let it be. Horatio, though I am dead, you live. It is up to you to report the facts of this affair. Explain my actions and my cause to the people.

Horatio  Do not believe it (that he (Horatio) is going to live). I am more of an ancient Roman than a Dane (inclined to commit suicide). There is still some of the poisoned liquor left.

Hamlet  As you are a noble man, give me the cup. Let go, by Heaven I’ll have it. O God, Horatio, what anguish you now face. A world which is ignorant of itself, I am
about to leave behind me. If you did ever love me, absent yourself from eternal
happiness a while longer, and endure this harsh world to tell my story.

_Soldiers are heard marching from afar and cannon fire is heard outside_

What warlike noise is this?

_Enter Osric_

**Osric** Young Fortinbras, who comes in conquest from Poland, to the ambassadors of
England, gives this salute.

**Hamlet** O, I die, Horatio. The potent poison quite overwhelms my spirit. I will not
live to hear the news from England, but I do prophesy that Fortinbras will be elected
as the new King of Denmark. He has my dying vote. So tell him, and impart to him all
that has happened here from which the current state of affairs has arisen and which
has inspired me to favour his succession to the throne. The rest is silence.

_Hamlet dies_

**Horatio** Now breaks a noble heart. Good night, sweet prince. May flights of angels
sing you to your eternal rest.

_The approach of marching soldiers becomes audible_

Why are there soldiers heading here?

_Enter Fortinbras and the English Ambassadors along with Soldiers from
Fortinbras’ army_

**Fortinbras** Where is this sight (the bodies of the dead, four of the most prominent
figures in Denmark), about which he has evidently just been informed)?

**Horatio** What is it you would see? If it is one of woe or horror that you seek, then
you have found it.

**Fortinbras** Such people murdered like this cries havoc. O proud Death, what feast is
being prepared in your eternal domain, that you have so many royal figures at once so
bloodily struck down?

**First Ambassador** The sight is indeed horrific; and we come too late with our news
from England. The King, to whom it was of concern, cannot now hear our report that
his commandment has been fulfilled, that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead.
From where, then, are we to receive our thanks?

**Horatio** It would not be from the King’s mouth, had he the ability to thank you. He
never issued any commandment for their death. But since, on the very occasion of this
bloody episode, you from the Polish conflict and you from England have arrived here,
you must see to it that these bodies are placed high on a stage, on display for all to see
- this matter is to be dealt with as openly as possible - and let me announce to the as
yet unknowing world how these things came about. So shall you hear of carnal, bloody and unnatural acts, of Divine punishment in what would seem to have been accidental, of casual slaughters, of deaths brought about through cunning and artifice, and in this upshot, schemes realised with plans which were flawed and badly executed, destroying the very perpetrators themselves. All of this can I truthfully reveal.

**Fortinbras** Let us take care of business here so we can hear it promptly. We’ll call the nobility to the audience. As for me, it is with sorrow that I embrace my fortune. I have some rights here in Denmark, of which it would be wise for me to now take advantage.

**Horatio** Of those rights I shall also have cause to speak and will prevail upon others to support your election to the throne. But let us attend to the matter at hand and perform this public duty immediately, even while people are still distraught and shaken, in case some further misfortune should befall us, on top of all the plots and misdeeds of which our present circumstances are the consequence.

**Fortinbras** Let four captains bear Hamlet like a soldier to the stage, for he was likely, had he been crowned king, to have proven most worthy; and as a mark of respect, the music and the rites granted a soldier fallen in battle shall be observed in all their glory for him. Take up the bodies. Such a sight as this becomes the battlefield, but here looks most amiss. Go, instruct the soldiers to fire the cannon.

*The bodies are carried out, after which there is a peal of cannon fire*